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Refractory Husbands

"Oh, if you do, I'm afraid I won't love you any more!"

[Meeting the Dog]

Refractory Husbands

By

Mary Stewart Cutting

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
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Refractory Husbands

When Aunt Mary Came

"WHEN Aunt Mary comes, Preston, you will just have to go to church!" Pretty Mrs. Chandor's tone was that of one nerved for combat.

"Anything you say," remarked her husband absently, with his eye still glued to the magazine he was reading in the waning light, as he sat on the piazza in a chair that was slightly tilted to allow for the comfortable placing of his feet on the railing, revealing an expanse of cadet-blue lisle stocking, matching his necktie, above the low, speckless patent-leather shoes. Mrs. Chandor's eye rested on him with a momentary esthetic pleasure, in the midst of her harassment; she never had to implore her husband to go and make himself "look nice," as Lucia Bannard was obliged to. Late shadows were lying across the pretty, smooth lawn; the wistaria lifted languidly in the dying breeze; from nearby came the sound of little boys' voices laughing and calling in some merry game. Everything was at peace but Elinor Chandor's mind.

"Preston, put down that book! It's too dark

for you to read, anyway. I was just saying that when Aunt Mary came you'd have to begin and go to church again. Besides, what would she think of *me* if you didn't? It would simply break her heart — she wouldn't understand at all. Not that *I* understand it myself — I never have! How a man, brought up as you were by her, can reconcile it to his conscience to stay away from church as you have lately — Sunday after Sunday! Do you realize how long it is since you were in one?"

"I haven't any idea," said her husband genially.

"Well, I was thinking about it just the other day. It's nearly *three years!*" Mrs. Chandor paused, with a little tremulousness in the last words. "Of course I know it began that winter when I was ill so much and we had Dr. Gleamer for rector. I know his delivery *was* dreadful, and he never said anything; but you stay home now just because you've got into the habit of staying home; you won't go and see for yourself how changed everything is, and hear what good sermons Mr. Owen preaches, and what lovely music we have — you just couldn't help liking it. I know people blame me for not having more influence over you! Oh, they do! I know it is partly my fault; but it is so hard for me to make you do anything you don't want to do."

Mrs. Chandor paused once more, and looked

at him piteously. "I wouldn't have Aunt Mary know for worlds! Why, she'd never get over it — and she's done so much for you always. I cannot have her hurt."

"Well, if you think it's necessary ——" began Mr. Chandor doubtfully. He reached over, and took his wife's hand, pressing his thumb on each of her soft knuckles in turn, in a way that with him expressed affection, while his gaze took note of her upturned blue eyes, her soft, ripply hair, and the slight feminine droop of her head to one side, which gave a suggestion of dependence. Mr. Chandor thought his wife exactly right; he had a permanent satisfaction, when he looked at her, in his choice.

"It does seem" — his voice rose argumentatively — "as if I might have one morning to do as I pleased in, after slaving all the week."

"Preston, how you act! Why on earth you should make such a fuss I can't see. You don't have to work as hard as that! And just because you like to lounge around all Sunday morning! Yes, I do think it's necessary. If you want to spoil Aunt Mary's visit entirely — and it *would* ——"

"Oh, all right, all right; I'll do it, of course," said her husband resignedly. "Now the subject's closed."

"You promise me faithfully you will go to church with Aunt Mary while she's here?"

"Yes, I'll promise. She shall do anything with me that she wants," said Mr. Chandor with emphasis. "And I hope you're satisfied now." He drew his wife's chair a little closer to him, and put his arm around her. "Poor girl, she has an awful time with her husband, hasn't she? Pity she didn't get a better one while she was about it."

"Oh, when you talk that way!" said his wife disdainfully unimpressed, yet yielding sweetly to the caress.

When it came down to it, she didn't think there was a better man in the world than Preston.

But she suddenly sat up straight as she saw a lady and gentleman approaching up the path, and gave her chair a little hitch away.

"Good evening, Mrs. Crandall. Good evening, Mr. Crandall!"

"You and your husband always seem to have so much to say to each other," said Mrs. Crandall, a nice-looking young woman with tired eyes, glancing now at her husband, a short square man with dark hair and an impassive countenance. "No, don't get up! We can't stay; I just stopped to give you this, Mrs. Chandor." She handed over a paper. "It's one of the new Sunday-school leaflets; I hear you're to take Miss Green's class while she's away. We all think it so charming of you. You ought to come

to church next Sunday, Mr. Chandor! Will is going to sing a solo in the new anthem; it's by Elgar; the most exquisite thing! — something above the heads of the congregation, I fear! But I suppose there is hardly any use in asking *you*."

"Yes, better come, and hear me," said Mr. Crandall, speaking for the first time and puffing out his chest.

"Why, I've just promised Elinor that I'd be there," said Mr. Chandor meditatively, "but if I have to hear your old bass growl, Crandall ——" He reached over and clapped the other on the shoulder, and both men grinned comfortably, while the two women exchanged confidential glances of question and assent, and then congratulation on the part of the visitor.

"I'll tell Dr. Owen to get at that sermon he's aways promised to preach for you, you old sinner," announced Mr. Crandall. "Come on, Nell, we must be getting home to the children. Hello, here's your boy! How are you, Teddy?"

"For goodness' sake, don't look at him," said Mrs. Chandor dejectedly. Teddy was one of those small boys who, let forth immaculate from a mother's hand at five o'clock, freshly bathed and brushed, and dressed in white linen, reappears in half an hour, his clothing soaked and limp with perspiration, and streaked with dust

from his matted hair to his shoes. From thence until bedtime his progression was unspeakable; there were nightly talks on the necessity of improvement. Lucile, her seven-year-old girl, really liked to be clean; Mrs. Chandor couldn't help wondering sometimes why it was so hard to make any impression on the masculine nature!

If Preston's friends had been of the non-churchgoing variety, his defection might have been the less obvious, but most of their little circle were interested in St. Stephen's. Will Crandall had been a choir-boy, and the habit still clung to him; not to sing in a choir would have dropped him out into the open wastes of life, where he had no accredited place. Dick Durland, who came over every Monday night to play chess with Preston, was a vestryman, although he wasn't half as well fitted to be an officer of the church as Preston. Jolly, middle-aged Mr. Brentwood, was a pillar of the parish as well as of trade; even Mr. Minott, who had been "something else" before he married Minnie Chase, attended services—intermittently, it is true, but still, he attended; Mr. Owen, the rector, was a frequent visitor of their next-door neighbours, the Bannards. And Preston put his hands in his pockets as frequently as any one when he was asked for subscriptions! His wife was proud of that, as of many other things about him.

Every one seemed to know by the next day that Mr. Chandor would be seen at church the following Sunday.

Mr. Durland jocularly asked if he should send an additional envelope for the collection, and Mr. Owen, meeting Preston in the street as the latter was coming home from the train, said, with a cordial greeting, that he was already working hard on that sermon!

Elinor Chandor, with prophetic vision, could see everybody waiting to shake hands with Preston as he left the sanctuary — she hoped they wouldn't be too effusive! She had a sudden fear that Lucia Bannard, who was an emotional young woman, though married, might even, in an excess of religious fervour, present Preston with some commemorative emblem or a book of devotion, to mark the event, and thus unalterably revolt the boyish shyness which dwells in the inner recesses of the nature of the real man, and keep him forever from repeating the action. There was a rapt, far-away gleam in Lucia's eye, when she had spoken of it that morning, that might bode anything. But Elinor was sure that if things were left in a normal state Preston would get in the habit of going to St. Stephen's once more, when he found out how changed it was; he couldn't help liking it now. It was time indeed that Aunt Mary came!

Aunt Mary was a large, fresh-coloured, gray-

haired lady, who looked her age — which she always proclaimed on every occasion — only in the way of becoming it. Her nephew averred that when he was a little boy he thought Aunt Mary's lap the most comfortable place in the world, and she still preserved this characteristic for all childhood. Their elders always had the feeling, after her arrival, that, if everything wasn't exactly right, it was going to be; she knew so many infallibly best ways of reaching perfection that all you needed was to make a little pleasing extra exertion to get there.

Her loud, clear voice and cheerful presence seemed to bring an atmosphere of agreeable competency.

"Indeed, the journey was nothing," she affirmed, when, dinner finished, she was comfortably bestowed by her nephew and niece in the biggest armchair on the piazza, with Lucile, a small-faced girl with gigantic butterfly bows on each side of her head, hanging on the arm of every one's chair in turn, as well as on the converse of her elders.

"There was a very kind young man who carried my bag for me — of course, there was no porter in sight! As I told him, when a woman is sixty-eight years of age she appreciates a courtesy. He said he was a student in the Theological Seminary, and I assured him of the pleasure it gave me, in these days when

young men are so lax, to find one who was preparing for the sacred calling of the ministry. He had such red eyes that I offered him my recipe for eye-lotion — it is so inexpensive and simple that no one should be without it."

"How very kind of you, Aunt Mary," murmured Elinor.

"It is especially excellent for children as a preventive," continued the visitor. "I was just noticing Lucile's eyes. Aunt Mary will prepare some of the lotion for you to-morrow, dear;" she patted the child's hand affectionately. "We'll put it in a cunning little bottle. I have one in my trunk; it has a glass stopper with a blue ribbon around it; and I have chocolate drops for a little girl who remembers to use it! — just the plain kind, Elinor, they won't hurt her."

"How attractive you always make every little thing, Aunt Mary," said Elinor, half enviously. "Doesn't she, Preston?"

"Yes, indeed," he agreed affectionately.

"My dear, it's the little things that it pays to take trouble about," said Aunt Mary benignly. "By the way, speaking of the ministry, what kind of a rector have you now, Preston?"

"Mr. Owen is a very nice fellow," answered her nephew sincerely.

"When I was here before, there was a good deal of dissatisfaction with Dr. Gleamer.

Many people had stopped going to church on account of him; and when that kind of habit once begins" — Aunt Mary sighed heavily — "there's no knowing where it will stop. It's the evil of the age."

"Papa's going to church next Sunday," carolled Lucile, throwing herself with precipitate affection at that parent. "Papa's going to church, aren't you, papa?" Her immense butterfly bows quivered wildly. "He's going to walk to church with *you*, Aunt Mary!"

Aunt Mary's look of growing surprise at Lucile's first statement relaxed into one of smiling appreciation.

"Why, of course, he is, the dear boy," she supplemented; "he doesn't have his old aunt to escort every day," while Elinor said with enforced sweetness:

"Run away, Lucile, at once, darling, and see what little brother is doing."

"Do you like your Mr. Owen's sermons, Preston?" pursued Aunt Mary.

"Best I've heard in years," said her nephew blandly.

"And is the music good?"

"Every one says it's fine."

"Well, you are fortunate," said Aunt Mary. She looked with fond affection at her niece and nephew.

"It is delightful to find myself here with you

again, and also to find you, Preston, the same dear, good boy you always were, so devoted to your church. Remind me, Elinor, when we go upstairs to-night, to ask you for an ordinary rubber band — you doubtless have plenty in your desk; I saw that the catch of one of the shutters in my room was slightly loose, and a rubber band will secure it nicely. And before I forget it, I want to say that I am going to make an old-fashioned rice pudding for you the first thing in the morning, so that it will be cold by dinner time; I heard you say, Elinor, that your maid didn't know how to do it properly. It is so delightful, as I was saying, to find myself here again in such a satisfactory household. When I was staying last month at the Shaws', it really made me feel dreadfully to find how lax Tom had become; a boy who was in my own Sunday-school class, too! Emma says that he never goes to church with her any more. When I spoke to him about it, he had those same old foolish excuses to offer that have been trumped up since the year one. I've no patience with them. I said to him: 'Tom Shaw, by the way you go on about hypocrites in the church, anybody'd think they went there to be *made* bad, instead of to be taught what's right, even if they don't follow it.' But I couldn't help feeling privately that it was mostly Emma's fault; her influence hasn't been what the influence of a

wife *should* be — not like yours, Elinor. You don't know how thankful I have always been that my dear boy has had your high character to uphold him."

"I say," remonstrated Mr. Chandor to his wife when they were at last alone, after she had sought high and low, unavailingly, for the needed rubber band, and Aunt Mary, hovering around after her, had promised to buy her a box of them in the morning, "I say, Elinor, you're making a regular Ananias and Sapphira out of me! Do you think it's right? Aren't you afraid retribution will overtake me?"

"No," said his wife stoutly; "I'm not. You'll deserve all you'll get, anyhow! Oh, Preston, I was ready to shriek once or twice! But" — her tone changed — "did you ever see anything like the way children always let out just what you don't want them to, the very first thing? I could have slapped Lucile! And it's worse telling them beforehand not to say what you don't want them to — that's fatal! They will always ask politely: 'Mamma, why mustn't I say this or that?' "

Her mind reverted to the welcome that might be made by members of the congregation to her husband next Sunday. The Crandalls she could warn, but her wifely dignity wouldn't let her take others into this demeaning confidence.

The culminating day of the week assumed an unusual halo that coloured all the hours leading up to it — Elinor wanted that Sunday to be perfect not only in its highest way, but in all those little material ways that show the festal spirit in them. She already had the promise of her new summer silk from the dressmaker — a simple little thing, the gray and white stripe that was so cool looking, and that Preston always liked. Her hat had been a great disappointment; it was a very large hat. She knew, of course, when she bought it that Preston invariably inveighed against large hats, but it had seemed so peculiarly becoming when she tried it on, both to herself and the milliner, besides being so exactly "the style," that she had been sure that Preston must consider it becoming, too. But when she had worn it for the first time, and, her eyes beseeching approval, she had asked: "How do you like my new hat, Preston?" he had dashed all her hopes to the ground by the fell words: "I don't like it at all!"

No normal woman can ever take any satisfaction in wearing a hat that her husband dislikes. Elinor had sadly felt obliged to wear hers, but for this coming Sunday she took down out of the closet a little old toque, that Preston had always admired her in, and that fitted down compactly over her rippling brown hair, and

trimmed it with a bunch of pink rosebuds, to be pleasing in his sight as they walked from the sanctuary. Nor did her preparations stop here; she would have a special plate of corn muffins for his breakfast that morning, smothered chicken, such as he used to have at his own home when a boy, for dinner, and the dessert should be boiled apple dumplings with hard sauce.

Elinor never could quite understand why the hot boiled apple dumpling should appeal so strongly to both the fancy and appetite of her husband; if he were asked, at any time of the year, what he would like for dessert, he always unhesitatingly answered, "Boiled apple dumplings."

From the morning after benevolent Aunt Mary's arrival, the household had benefited steadily by her suggestions and assistance. The promised rice pudding had been made, indeed, after a long delay, during which Aunt Mary, in a white apron, sat cheerfully patient while Elinor strove maddeningly at the telephone, first in ordering the rice and nutmeg — which of course no kitchen storeroom should be without — and then in asking why the articles didn't come, and then in striving excitably to point out the fact that, even if they *were* "on the wagon" an hour ago, they were of no culinary use in that position. But the rice pudding,

when it was finally set before them at night, was of the creamiest, most delicious variety, and there was actually enough of it for everybody, which is so seldom the case with a really good rice pudding.

Aunt Mary hung up the two brooms by strings so that they should not be worn out by resting on the floor, reminding the maid smilingly of this usage, during the day; she made dusters, and little bags for them, disposing them conveniently everywhere, so that one could always dust on the spot; she screwed up a hook behind the side door where Teddy could reach it to hang his hat, under her kindly supervision, in strict observance of this rite.

She was continually saying to Elinor as the latter hurried about her avocations:

"Now do sit down for a few minutes, dear, you're tired; you may not know it now, but you'll feel it afterward. 'Rest when you can!' that has always been my motto. A young mother never realizes how much vitality she may use up unnecessarily."

Aunt Mary had many long, serious, and uplifting conversations with her niece on the subject of living, based on the thoughtful experience of a courageous woman of sixty-eight who had been through a good deal in her day. She was so indefatigably kind and resourceful and helpful, her advice was so indisputably good, that

Elinor was horrified to find herself at times wishing that she might weakly relapse unnoticed into doing things hit or miss, in her own natural way, even though it mightn't be the best one at all, instead of having everything arranged for her. Even Preston showed an occasional fretting of the bit under prolonged instruction.

It was in vain to deny that kind Aunt Mary, beloved as she certainly was, had a will of her own; it was impossible to gainsay her; as everything was for one's own good, it would have seemed the part of the ingrate to strive to balk her, even if the striving had been of any use. Yet with that, perhaps, natural weariness of the flesh, on her young relative's part, was mingled Elinor's deep gratitude at Aunt Mary's unconscious influence over Preston in the matter of the Sunday observance. There was soft radiance, a melting happiness in Elinor's eyes at moments, unknown to herself, when she regarded her husband, of which he found himself tenderly and comprehendingly conscious. His wife wasn't like most women — there was a lot she never talked about.

Others were thinking of the day as well as she. Will Crandall, as she met him Saturday afternoon coming from the train, announced that he had applied to sing *two* solos for the occasion! Mr. Owen took off his hat to her with a smile of remembrance, and Lucia Bannard

herself came to the house with a pensive, uplifted look in her dark eyes and some sprays of lilies of the valley.

"They are out of our own garden," she announced in her low, thrilling voice. "We are all going to wear them to church to-morrow. I thought if you and your husband would each wear a spray, it would show that we were all together."

"Why, that's awfully sweet of you," said Elinor, kissing her friend warmly.

She pinned the flower in her husband's buttonhole the next morning, when, the corn muffins enjoyed and the apple dumplings secretly accomplished, she was all ready and dressed to set out. She had to go early to-day, that was the only drawback, on account of substituting for Miss Green with that lady's Sunday-school class. It was too bad that she couldn't walk to church with Preston, but she would walk back with him, and Aunt Mary would love to have him all to herself going there.

"Lucia Bannard wanted you to wear this," she announced. "We all have them in honour of the occasion."

"Why, that's nice of her," said Preston, very much surprised, but rather pleased. She stood there in her gray-and-white striped silk and the little hat, with a bunch of pink rosebuds, framing her rippling hair, her soft blue eyes gazing

up at him with that new, happy light in them. He drew her to him, and kissed her, his arms lingering around her as he whispered:

"You're an awfully nice woman, do you know that? Best wife I ever had."

The day was beautiful, though warm; the walk to church was long, but Elinor was not tired. Lucile and Teddy went prattling along beside her.

By some miraculous sixth sense, after reaching Sunday-school, though she hardly heard what the children in the class were reciting, or asking her, she seemed to be equal to the requirements of the situation. Her mind was bent on the triumphant moment that was coming, when she should be in her own pew and, looking up, see Aunt Mary's fine, fresh-coloured face, her gray hair and her stately presence, coming down the aisle with — Preston; Preston, tall, well-dressed and fine-looking; nay, handsome! He mightn't be handsome to any one else, but he was to her.

She was in the pew at last, Lucile and Teddy had gone home. People came in gradually, by twos and threes; the organ was playing the voluntary — then more people; the church was filling up, yet none from her household appeared. The choir-boys were entering, singing lustily; she stood up, still no one! Had anything hap-

pened? She saw, with swift-beating heart, the house on fire — Aunt Mary in a fit of apoplexy — Preston stabbed by a passing tramp!

The service began, still no one! But as she knelt, some one slipped into the pew beside her, and Aunt Mary, flushed and breathing hard, yet composed, slid with competent facility into prayer.

Elinor had to wait until they arose, to ask agonizingly, "Has anything happened?" and receive Aunt Mary's decisive shaking of the head and the words, framed laboriously, almost inaudibly, with her lips:

"I had a telegram just as I was starting; I will have to leave immediately after dinner to see my brother to-morrow before he sails."

"And Preston?" breathed the wife.

"I'll tell you about him later," nodded Aunt Mary quietly, and relapsed prohibitively into worship.

"You see, my dear, it was this way," she announced, when the service was over and they were free of the congregation and the amused I-told-you-so looks that Elinor could feel passing over her. Aunt Mary's kind face shone tenderly on her young companion as they walked along under the green branches of the spreading elms. "My dear, you may not have noticed it — he kept up until after you left — but I couldn't help seeing then, when I was alone

with Preston, that there was something weighing on the dear boy. I never saw any one get so restless. He couldn't keep still a moment, though I was reading him a most interesting article on the Diseases of the Throat — a subject of moment to every one; as I always say, 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' He had *such* a line between his eyes, and there was a strange lassitude about him that convinced me that he was in pain.

"Of course, when I asked him if there was anything the matter, he denied it at first — men always do — but I just said: 'Preston, dearie, if you think you can hoodwink your Aunt Mary, who brought you up, and who knows you better than any one else, dear, you're much mistaken. I *know* you've got one of your bad headaches, and there's no use your saying you haven't. I'm the last person to advocate any one staying home from church as a usual thing, but there's common sense in all things; you don't go a step out in that sun to-day, if *I* know it. Well, Elinor, it really touched me to find how much the dear boy hated to miss even one service, and when it came down to it, I could see, besides, that he thought his little wife wouldn't approve of his absence; but this time I was firm. I knew you would understand." She paused.

"Yes," said Elinor, striving for self-control.

"He didn't want to go upstairs and lie down, but I left him in the shaded corner of the piazza," went on Aunt Mary happily, "stretched out comfortably, with a pillow behind his head, in the steamer-chair, with the collect, epistle and gospel to read — I found them for him myself in the prayer-book — and a glass of water beside him. I knew you really wouldn't mind when I told you the facts of the case. I have no doubt that we shall find him much better on our return now. And, my dear, take the word of a woman of sixty-eight; nothing is gained by *forcing* a man to keep up to a certain mark! Preston can be safely left to his own guidance."

"I really did want to go," whispered her husband, in ludicrous, dismayed protest, as Elinor bent over him. "I couldn't help it; I give you my word!"

"I know," whispered his wife smilingly in return. She pressed her cheek against his. "It's going to be just the same for me as if you went. And, after all" — she stopped a moment before she murmured shyly — "dear, I always take you in my heart with me anyway, when I go to church. I didn't need to have Aunt Mary come for that."

A Friend of the Married

A Friend of the Married

LUCIA BANNARD, in a becoming lavender gown, sat in her pretty yellow bedroom, on a Sunday morning, gazing at a large and dingy overcoat spread out before her on the bed.

The Bannards' small home was conceded to be one of the most charming in the neighbourhood. Everything with which Lucia had to do was perfect so far as taste was concerned; even the Brentwoods' big roomy mansion, with its old, harmonious furnishings, its stacks of books and air of comfort and prosperity, couldn't compare in a sort of exquisite, inspiring beauty with the Bannards'. In the nine years of her married life it had been one of Lucia's chief objects to gather the things together which, as she expressed it, were "right," even if the house had to wait, scantily furnished, from Christmas to Christmas, for a chair, or bookcase, or rug.

Lucia herself bore out the character of the house. She was a beautiful young woman, with a slender figure, very large and expressive dark eyes, a short upper lip with a proud yet infantile

curve, and pale golden hair. Her taste in her own dress was as perfect as in other things. She was a clever manager, and never told any one but Elinor Chandor, her next door neighbour, how little her clothes cost: she seldom talked of any of her economies. Even the maid who answered the door, showed an extra nicety of cap and apron, as well as in smiling good looks.

Where everything was so esthetically "right," the one discordant note, in the matter of suitable appearance, was Mrs. Bannard's husband: he was a delightful young man, but he would not buy clothes. As he came in now, tall, happily light-footed, with a noticeably distinguished bearing and a teasing twinkle in his nice blue eyes, she interrupted his cheerful if tuneless whistle to say abruptly, as her eyes wandered over his big figure:

"Donald, you will have to order your new overcoat at once, if you're going up to the head office with Rex Courtney on the first: it's only two weeks from Wednesday!"

"Why do I need a new one when I've got this?" asked her husband with prompt conclusiveness.

"*Why?* For the same reason I've told you twenty times before, Donald Bannard, because this one is worn out!"

"I don't see anything much the matter with it," said Mr. Bannard unimportantly.

He took up the garment and examined it with a cheerfully appraising eye.

"All it needs, is to have a few little things done to it: a new collar, perhaps — velvet gets worn of course — and the buttonholes worked over where they're split, and the lining patched up. I don't see but what that will make it all right for this winter; lots of wear in that coat yet!"

"Donald Bannard, if you begin talking like that again after all I've said to you before, you'll drive me raving crazy! You've worn that dreadful, cheap thing — I've always detested it! — for five years. You've had the collar renewed three times, and the buttonholes worked over so often that the last time even the tailor objected to doing it. If you have it done again, it will take buttons the size of tea-plates to hold them. And it's all frayed out around the wrists and shiny in the seams: it's horrid; it's *disgusting!* It took away all my pleasure every time I went out with you last winter. You owned, yourself, in the spring, that you could never put it on again. Whenever I've spoken to you about it since, you've promised me you'd go to Grandon's this fall and order a really handsome coat, good material and all, the kind Rex Courtney wears. And now ——"

The tears welled thickly in Mrs. Bannard's

lovely eyes, while her husband obliviously searched for something in a chiffonier drawer, whistling under his breath.

"And you needn't try and act as if you didn't care when I speak to you this way: you *ought* to care! I have to work, and work, and *work*, to make you buy the ordinary clothes that other men get as a matter of course. If you hadn't the money now, Donald, I wouldn't say a word, but when I've taken such pains to save up enough so that you could get a really *good* coat — going without a new suit myself, though goodness knows I need one! but, then, a woman can fix up things to cover deficiencies, and everything does show so on a man! And I've made over my blue satin myself, just because I had set my heart on your looking as you ought. Are you listening?"

"Yes, I'm listening," said Mr. Bannard, smiling at his wife. He had a smile that invariably charmed; it was always with great effort that Lucia withstood it, but she did so now; she met his eyes stolidly as he continued with growing restiveness:

"What difference does it make what I have on, anyway? It's my own affair if I choose to wear what I please. Great Scott, Lucia, I'll be so busy these next two weeks, I'm nearly crazy as it is; I haven't time to go hanging around the tailors. All this talk about dress

makes me sick: people don't judge me by my clothes!"

"You're very much mistaken, that's just what lots of people do judge you by," returned his wife triumphantly. "One thing is certain, you cannot go up to the head office with Rex Courtney if you haven't a new overcoat; I'd *die* of mortification if you did! And if you think going up there looking like a tramp will advance your interests, Donald Bannard ——"

"Oh, well, then, don't say another word," said Mr. Bannard in a slightly raised key. "Stop right there! I'll get the coat."

"And you will go to Grandon's and bring home samples of cloth to-morrow?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Look here, Lucia," Mr. Bannard's tone changed from one of reluctant submission to that of masculine authority, "have you been taking my small screw-driver out of this drawer *again?*"

"No, no, I haven't taken it! Oh — yes, perhaps I did take it for just a moment. Ellen wanted one for the wringer, but I put it right back again; I'm perfectly positive."

"Well, you didn't," said her husband witheringly. He faced her with his shoulders thrown back and his nice blue eyes flashing lightning. "*How many times have I told you*, Lucia, not to touch that screw-driver? Things have come

to a pretty pass if I can't keep one thing of my own where I can lay my hand on it!"

"I know I put it back, but I'll go and look for it this minute," said his wife, hurrying off with placating alacrity. She had gained her point!

The next evening he really brought the samples home with him, and studied over their possibilities with her, in as deep interest as if he hadn't fought against the proceeding. They spent the evening, in the intervals of reading and conversation, in hanging small dabs of cloth on his coat-sleeve and considering them from different angles. There were all the ones that wouldn't do at all, and the four or five that were so attractive that one hardly knew how to make a choice. But both at last fixed on an Oxford gray that wasn't an Oxford gray, but something darker, richer, indescribably satisfactory in colour, and stylish, as Lucia proclaimed, to a degree. She saw Donald in prospect in a quiet-toned, richly soft, superlatively cut topcoat that would even surpass that of Rex Courtney.

Rex Courtney was the one unmarried man in the little intimate social circle of which the Bannards composed a part. There were other young men in the place, of course, but they were of the ordinary sort, who were only interested in their own kind, or in girls, whereas

Rex was superlatively the friend of the married. He was credited with having had an affair of the heart — perhaps, indeed, two or three — in which he had been, colloquially, so "hard hit" as to turn his mind from love toward the less demanding comforts and pleasures of friendship.

He, like Donald Bannard, was "in Steel," but he travelled much of the time in its interests, often returning only over the week-end, and so warmly pleased to be welcomed in the houses of his more fortunate fellowmen that each household vied with the other in the possessiveness of its welcoming; each wife wished to believe that hers was the abode in which he *really* felt most at liberty to smoke when he desired to, and ask for cake when he wanted it.

He was a favourite with all the men. He was indeed an extremely nice fellow, cheery, entertaining, and indefatigably considerate of womankind, performing all the little courteous attentions which their husbands meant to perform, but didn't; he brought boxes of candy and flowers, and never forgot the children, who were devoted to him. His perfection in these respects, instead of casting a slur on the husbands seemed on the contrary to raise the standard of all the male sex; the men concerned had the effect of generously allowing services that belonged to them by right. If at times he strove to help over those places where both

husband and wife from their inner circle knew that no help was needed, they only smiled at each other comprehendingly. Lucia liked to feel that Donald was really the nicest after all.

Rex gave the impression of thinking sympathetically: "If *I* could get as charming a wife and as delightful a home as this, you bet it wouldn't be long before I'd have them; but I know very well it can't be duplicated. It's awfully good of you to let me have a little corner here."

For the rest, he was in the early thirties, not very tall, but broad-shouldered, fair, clean-shaven, and with very white teeth; as Lucia Bannard had hinted, he was always notably well dressed.

The women, though giving him his title in converse, always spoke of him as Rex Courtney; there was something in the name itself that showed you what he was like. The men called him, familiarly, Court.

He had been at one time most intimate at the Crandalls, and then at the Chandors; but lately his visits had grown more frequent to the Bannards, with whom, though the latest known, he found many interests in common. He and Donald were both ambitious so far as Steel was concerned, and his appreciation of Lucia's love of beauty was of an intelligent kind which she didn't usually receive. He had,

besides, a real masculine force that made his sympathetic insight of her aims and motives very delightful to receive. When he occasionally joked with Donald on some solecism in the latter's attire, she felt deeply — though she never spoke on the subject to Rex Courtney — that he saw and appreciated her troubles in that line.

It was this man with whom Donald was to travel in company to report at the head office on the first of the month.

"Did you take the samples back to Grandon's to-day?" Lucia asked her husband anxiously the next night after he had come home from town.

"Yes," said Donald lightly.

"I hope to goodness you showed him the right sample!"

"I certainly did. Grandon says it will make a fine coat."

"And when will it be finished, dear?"

"Oh, some time within the next two weeks; before the first, you may depend on that; Grandon never disappoints. And, look here, Lucia"— he spoke gently but firmly, kissing her upturned face half absently as if it were some necessary refreshment—"I don't want to be questioned about that overcoat every night when I come home! When it's done I'll get it, and that is all there is to it. And, by the

way, you might as well telephone to Bergwitz to-morrow, and have him send over for the old coat and put it in some kind of shape. It may turn cold suddenly."

"Well," said Lucia grudgingly, "I'd like to pitch the thing out of the window this very minute, but I don't want you to get pneumonia, of course."

It did turn cold by the end of the following week, that bitter cold that comes sometimes in late November. Only the thought of the beautiful garment her husband was to have, supported Lucia in the ordeal of seeing him in the old one. The tailor's art had somehow failed him in the renovation; perhaps he had tried it so often that he had lost heart; those awful buttonholes sprawling over one side, the threadbare edge, its indescribable air of rustiness and collapse, were accentuated by the new velvet of the collar. It took enormous self-control on Lucia's part not to burst out at him violently when he put it on. A pregnant, withheld silence, in which she was apparently oblivious of her husband, always made him demonstratively affectionate, while she, on the other hand, became warmest when he was cool. Sometimes things went his way, and sometimes they went her way; and no human power could ever predict whose day it was going to be. They

were a young couple who, on the whole, found great interest in life.

It was on the Monday evening before the trip, and while Lucia was hourly expecting the arrival of the new garment, that Donald came home earlier than usual, particularly brisk and affectionate.

"What do you say to going to town for a little treat to-night?" he asked. "Somebody gave Court three tickets for the opera, and he wants us to meet him in town after an early dinner. Can you make it?"

"Can I make it!" cried Lucia rapturously. She flew at her husband and embraced him, while he fished in his pockets for a time-card. "I can get dressed in five minutes. You'll have to change, yourself; you'll wear your evening clothes, of course."

"Oh, it never takes me long to get into them," said her husband easily. To do Donald justice he never minded wearing clothes when he had them: it was the bother of getting them at which he balked.

She surveyed her husband with pride and pleasure when he was arrayed in his handsome, well-fitting evening togs. Heaven only knows what she had gone through before they were accomplished, long after his original suit had grown too small for him! The last time he had worn the latter was at a wedding. She had

begged and prayed him for three weeks beforehand, ever since the cards were out, on their return from the summer vacation, to get those clothes down and try them on, and he wouldn't, with the result that the very night of the festivity he had had to have the waistcoat split up the back, because it wouldn't button in front, and her sister Bess had inserted a wedge-shaped piece: Lucia was so angry that she wouldn't touch a needle to it! When he put on the coat, it skewered him to that degree that he looked ridiculously like a trussed chicken. He couldn't move all the evening for fear of its splitting. That had settled it: he had ordered a suit the next day, but his surrender taught him no lesson.

The one drawback to the evening now was that that fiendish overcoat had to be put on above his splendour. She fancied that Rex Courtney's eyes took note of it curiously. She felt his underlying sympathy with her when he complimented her later on the becomingness of her pale blue satin — under her lovely white cloak — with its tunic and tight skirt, after the fashion of the day, and the blue, silvered bandeau in her golden hair.

"You have the art of making whatever you wear look as if it were the one perfect thing," he announced; and she did not think it neces-

sary to inform him that the gown was one of her exquisite economies, made over laboriously by her own fingers, so that her money for a new one might swell the fund for her darling Donald's overcoat. He was careless as to his expenditures; his money was apt to melt as soon as he touched it; she had to be the wise provider!

Yet there was something in Rex Courtney's praise now that she found vaguely haunting her. It wasn't in what he said, but in something he hadn't said, something, she was sure, that he had wanted to speak of; she felt it all through the opera.

"Thank you for a most delightful evening; it's been a joy!" she breathed fervently when they were parting at last on the home doorstep, and he had answered simply:

"I'm so glad you liked it; it's been a great pleasure to me," and added, turning to Donald:

"We'll have to do this oftener, together, the three of us. I don't know of any one who has a greater appreciation of beauty *and* a good time than your wife, Bannard!" Both men looked at her affectionately.

"You're about right there, Court!" said Bannard with his hand on Lucia's arm.

To have Rex Courtney speak in that way about her! Nell Crandall and her husband used to get all Rex Courtney's extra tickets, but now —— !

She wondered again the next morning, however, what it was that he didn't say.

But she said to her husband suddenly before he left:

"Donald, do you realize that that overcoat hasn't come home yet, and you start to-morrow night?"

"Yes, Lucia, I realize it," he answered tersely.

"Be sure and see about it to-day. Don't chance their sending it. Wear it home, and let them send the one you have on. I'd have a fit if anything went wrong about it."

"Look here, Lucia, who's getting this overcoat, you or I?" he asked imperturbably.

"Goodness knows that, if I had been getting it, you'd have had one long before this," replied Lucia with a desperate gesture and a theatrical moan.

It did not arrive during the day, nor did he wear it home. Lucia, on tenterhooks, after the first moment's questioning, subsided; she saw that look on her husband's face which warned off speech. She could get nothing out of him, except that it would be all right the next day; otherwise, as she confessed to herself, he was as dear as only he could be. He had brought her a box of marrons as a solace after he left, and was so delightful a lover that she couldn't bear to mar the hour in any way.

All Wednesday she looked forward to the moment when he would arrive, resplendent, for those last couple of hours before going in town again to start off for the night.

At his footfall she rushed downstairs and turned up the hall light, that his effulgence might burst upon her. Instead, he stood there as usual, taking the newspapers out of the worn pockets of his old coat.

"Donald Bannard!" she began wildly, before he stopped her with a gesture:

"There's no use your saying anything. I never ordered the coat; that's all!"

"*You never ordered it!* You told me yourself that you went to Grandon's; you ——"

"I did go to Grandon's, and showed him the sample we picked out, but I was in such a tearing rush that I couldn't even wait to be measured then; I said I'd be over the next morning. I've honestly expected every single day to go in, but I've been so all-fired busy that I just haven't had a minute. Great Scott, Lucia, when a man has as much to see to as I've had lately, you can't expect him to bother about such a little thing as *clothes!* I've been nearly wild. You will just have to let me go on as I am till things straighten out a bit and I have more time."

"Oh, that's the way you always talk," said his wife bitterly. Her large eyes dwelt on him

with a tragic despair. She had nothing to say: it was too dreadful. She had done her best; if he made a bad impression at the office, she couldn't help it. What was the use of struggling any more? Perhaps he had been too busy. She had a strange, forlorn, feminine pride in his being beyond her control, even in her despair. She did not see how she could ever say any more to him about that overcoat than she had said.

She had thought this the height of the situation, but there was a peak beyond, unseen as yet. In the three days before his return she found herself growing tired, incapable in thought of managing things. She wasn't used to being without Donald, and she seemed to be illimitably homesick for him. She wanted to feel his dear hand; she could forgive him temporarily for his tacit deception of her if he would only come back.

But the step on the piazza, when it did come, was not Donald's, but Rex Courtney's.

"Where's Donald?" she asked anxiously as she greeted him.

"Oh, he's all right. He had business that detained him. I came on this morning," said Rex. "He asked me to leave these papers here for him and to tell you he'd be out on the last train. I'll only sit down for a moment."

"Did you have a nice trip?" she asked perfunctorily.

"Yes, it was all right," said Mr. Courtney with a reminiscent smile. "Donald's a fine travelling companion. The company gave us a bang-up supper the other night, too. I got my promotion. I hope Donald will get his soon; but ——" Rex paused, and slapped his knee meditatively with the gloves he held in his right hand.

"There's something that's been on my mind for some time, Mrs. Bannard. I wonder if you'll let me speak to you about it now?" He faced her earnestly. "It concerns Donald."

"Why, certainly," said Lucia, confusedly agitated. What did he mean? What *could* he mean?

"Well, it's just this, Mrs. Bannard: Ronald ought to be more particular about his dress. A woman is apt to think that only her own clothes matter; she spends on them all the money her husband can spare, as a usual thing. It's her right, of course, to make herself look charming — no one knows how better than you, Mrs. Bannard — but it's a mistake to think that a man's clothes don't matter just as much; it is indeed! A woman doesn't see the business side of it: it makes a great difference in many ways if a man looks well dressed,

prosperous; *respectable*, in short! Other people place much more confidence in him. Now that overcoat your husband wears ——" Rex lowered his voice tenderly as his eyes dwelt on the downcast face of his pretty hostess —— "Really, Mrs. Bannard, you should never have let him off in a thing like that; it gives every one a wrong impression, and he's such an all around fine fellow, I hate to see it. You feel all right, don't you, Mrs. Bannard? You haven't been ill? Of course I know that no matter what he has on he looks all right to *you;* that's the woman of it!" He smiled encouragingly as he rose.

"I'm sure it is only a little thought on your part that is needed. You will forgive me, Mrs. Bannard, won't you, for taking so much upon me?" He looked at her anxiously. "Really you *don't* seem well."

"Oh, I'm perfectly well," said Lucia, controlling her voice by a superhuman effort. It was as much as she could do not to let herself burst forth in towering hysterical wrath at this unspeakable blunderer.

Instead, she achieved, for the moment, a languid, chill carelessness of voice and manner as she went on:

"I think, however, with all your kind intentions, you are just a little mistaken; outsiders often are, don't you think? A man like *my*

husband has no fear of being judged by his clothes; he dresses entirely to please himself, and *I* should never think of interfering. But I'm sure you meant well. Good night!"

That night a tall young man in an old overcoat plunged from the last train into the snow that was beginning to fall, and walked with cheerful, anticipative steps toward his home, happily unconscious of the tempest that he was to be called upon to soothe when he got there. But it has been noticed since that there has been no better dressed man in the place than Donald Bannard, beginning with that very handsome overcoat which even threw in the shade that of Rex Courtney's, who, by the way, doesn't seem to visit the Bannards as much as formerly, Lucia owning to Elinor Chandor that they found him rather stupid at times. Perhaps a friend of the married is most successful in that capacity when he is content simply to admire, and does not dash in where wiser men might fear to say a word.

Father's Little Joke

Father's Little Joke

"MOTHER, don't you think we might invite the Iversons here next week?"

It was Winifred Brentwood who spoke; she was the dark-haired one, while her sister Audrey was fair. Both were unusually tall and beautiful girls. When people asked pretty, plump Mrs. Brentwood if it didn't make her feel old to have such grown up young daughters, she only smiled a superior disclaimer — the people who could ask you such a question wouldn't understand if you told them how delightful it was to be a girl again in the intimate company of two others, who treated her at times with a disrespectful comradeship that she adored! She looked fondly now at Winifred as the latter continued:

"If Audrey and I hadn't met Leslie Iverson last month in Denver I shouldn't feel the same way about it. Of course we only saw him twice, but he was so very nice, and he seemed so anxious to have us know his mother. I told him, momsey, that you and she had exchanged calls last winter, but that I knew you were going

to invite her to the house as soon as Audrey and I got back. I want to have everything as attractive as possible ——" she paused, and added impulsively: "He is so nice; I'd like her to think we are nice, too! Not that I expect to see anything of him when he comes east at the end of the month — he is here so seldom and stays such a short while, that they want him at home all the time. His mother always has a house-party for him over the week-end."

"Yes, and I know that he hopes she'll ask us," chimed in the younger sister eagerly. "He says they have a grand time."

Winifred's cheeks glowed consciously. "Audrey, how you talk! It's not at all likely that she will even *think* of it!"

Mrs. Brentwood gave a penetrative glance at her daughter, but she only said matter-of-factly:

"Of course we ought to have had the Iversons here long ago. It is nearly a year since they moved into the place, but there always seems to be so much going on ——"

She stopped with a reminiscent sigh. The Brentwoods, in their comfortable, roomy, prosperous house, practised such continuous haphazard hospitality that it was hard to know where to sandwich in formal entertaining such as this of the Iversons would have to be. The Iversons were not only very much richer than

any one else in the little community — Mr. Iverson being many times a millionaire — but they were rigidly correct and elegant both in appointment and demeanour; as one might say, "icily regular, splendidly null." The time Mrs. Brentwood had called, the tea things and biscuits had been brought in by two butlers; one couldn't imagine anything haphazard in connection with the Iversons.

"Shall we ask them to dinner?" she went on.

"No, no, not dinner! Luncheon," answered Winifred. "Mother, stop pulling at your waist! That isn't the way to make it stay down. Lean over to me a moment. You do get your hair so tight at the sides! There, that's better." She gave the offending parent an affectionate pat. "I think it had better be luncheon."

"Then we can't have Mr. Iverson."

"No, we'll just ask Mrs. Iverson and her sister. We won't try to have any men; Mr. Iverson is so delicate that he probably wouldn't come."

"Father doesn't care for that sort of thing anyway," said Audrey.

There was a moment's silence. "No, your father doesn't care for that kind of thing," corroborated Mrs. Brentwood. They had all known from the beginning that they would decide on the luncheon, and why.

Mr. Brentwood was a tall, strongly built

man of fifty, with an almost military bearing, a handsome gray head, fine features, a gray moustache, and an infectious smile. His family adored father, who, in addition to his noble-mindedness, unselfishness, and sweet temper, was generous to a degree, and always thinking of the welfare and happiness of his family. He was one of those fathers of whom there are not too many, whose duty to them did not end with providing money — his children were as much a matter of his intimate care and companionship, if in different ways, as they were their mother's; his responsibility for them was always back of hers, to be trustfully relied on and appealed to. Mrs. Brentwood looked with wonder not unmixed with disdain at the women who actually boasted of having the sole management of their boys and girls. Mr. Brentwood was well born, well educated, and successful in affairs. He had, in the eyes of his family, but one fault: he had a masculine sense of humour of a homely, almost rural type, at which they winced uncontrollably. Mrs. Brentwood, even from the earliest days of their marriage, had been wont to implore her Theodore, when they were expecting company, *not* to be "funny."

Certain jokes or mannerisms of his at the table were of daily occurence. Hardly noticed any more when they were alone, they sprung

unto startling prominence when there were guests. He always said: "People come from miles around to hear us drink soup." He jovially inquired if he might "borrow the butter," or if Ellen, the waitress, could "spare him another slice of bread." He made puns on the vegetables, and he had a habit of looking with sudden suspicion at any dish handed to him, no matter how familiar, and asking disgustedly, "What *is* this anyway?" Strangers always inspired him particularly to their entertainment. Certain ancient, inherited anecdotes could be endured by his wife and children, even if with aching strain, but there was a bath-tub story (Mr. Brentwood had in his early boyhood migrated with his parents to what was then the edge of the prairie) beginning mendaciously: "You know we never took baths when I was a boy," that, though it *was* amusing, nearly went beyond the pale of refinement, and an awful tooth-brush story which positively did. If people laughed at his stories, Mr. Brentwood became practically untrammelled.

It was better indeed to ask the Iversons to luncheon! No matter how deeply he was warned against it, father would have his little joke.

There was a distinct glow of satisfaction when Mrs. Iverson and her sister, Miss Loomis,

promptly accepted the invitation; it amounted almost to a feeling of proprietorship in them when they were seen passing in one of their many automobiles. And there was a further glow of satisfaction when the morning of the festivity heralded a perfectly beautiful autumn day.

"Did father go to town?" asked Winifred suddenly, as she bent over the gorgeous mass of flowers she was arranging for the table.

"No," said the mother, "he drove up to the golf club for the tournament."

"To the golf club! Then won't he——" Audrey stopped short.

"When your father goes to the links, he never comes home till six o'clock," said the mother tranquilly.

"Unless his leg troubles him," suggested Audrey blankly.

Mr. Brentwood had had a slight accident the year before that occasionally disabled him. He always referred to the cause as "that infernal ligament."

"Oh, it hasn't troubled him this fall," said Mrs. Brentwood, gazing secretly at Winifred bending over the flowers. She had a little uneasy divination that Winifred, who was usually unimpressionable, had been more "taken" with Leslie Iverson than the girl herself realized. Once in a while Audrey's glance, meeting her

mother's, seemed to confide the same thought. Even if she *had* only met him twice — Winifred had changed in some way. Mrs. Brentwood, as she looked carefully over her lace-edged plate-doilies to see that there was no imperfection in them, sighed unconsciously, as she thought of that new look in Winifred's eyes, with the aching, mature knowledge of the frequent, crude denial of the opportunities of life in spite of the young rosy vision that creates them.

The Iversons, with their retinue of servants, might readily be supposed to have none of the delightfully intimate pleasure of preparation for a festivity that was the habit of the Brentwoods. It was a part of the enjoyment of the thing, though the preparations indeed had their distracting side when it was found that the best lace centrepiece had been put away by a careless maid, with a spot of chocolate on it; also, when Mrs. Brentwood temporarily mislaid the key to the trunk containing the fancy silver, and two of the tall goblets had mysteriously become cracked since the last using. There was quite an argument as to whether the round table should be made large for six or kept without the extra leaf, but Winifred insisted that it was cosier small. Everything seemed perfect when it was finished; no table, with the efforts of ten butlers, could

have looked more exquisite. There was a serene security as to the food; it was always, as some one had proclaimed, "the best ever." The family, dressed competently on time, in the drawing-room, were each a credit to the other; Mrs. Brentwood in a becoming mauve robe, Audrey in blue, and Winifred in the white gown and scarlet ribbons that suited her dark hair and glowing cheeks and lips so well. When the bell rang, they congratulated themselves on being ready; but it was, after all, only pretty young Mrs. Bannard, as first arrival, full of neighbourly behind-the-scenes interest.

"How lovely it all looks," she breathed as she seated herself by Winifred. "I took a peep in the dining-room as I came in."

"You've met Mrs. Iverson and her sister before, haven't you, Lucia?" asked Mrs. Brentwood.

"Yes; I've met them several times," answered Mrs. Bannard with what seemed some delicate reservation. "They're very nice, oh, very nice indeed! as every one says; but we find them a little *difficult* to know. I think they are used to a very formal way of living, and of course here in this place ——" Mrs. Bannard spread out her hands lightly. "Is Mr. Brentwood at the golf tournament? My husband is coming out for it."

"Yes, father went up there this morn-

ing," said Winifred, rising with a flush. "Mother ——"

The state guests were entering the room.

Mrs. Iverson was a slender, fragile woman with a long throat, a small, narrow face and very light hair and eyes; her colourlessness was accentuated by a pale gray gown. She had an air at once of extreme unobtrusiveness and great elegance. Her expression seemed habitually anxious; when she spoke, a couple of vertical lines in the middle of her forehead became contracted. Her sister, Miss Loomis, who lived with her, was heavy-chinned and dark-eyebrowed, her stout figure straightly busked and stayed into the mould that fashion required; she had a little the air of being more the rose than the rose itself. The apparently modest gowns of both women were, to the practised eye, of Parisian manufacture. A chilled atmosphere seemed to enter with them.

"I hope we're not late," said Mrs. Iverson, after the first greetings, glancing swiftly about her, while the nervous vertical lines appeared in her forehead.

"No, indeed!" responded Mrs. Brentwood warmly.

"My husband dislikes so much to have us late anywhere. He is home to-day with a headache; he has been quite an invalid lately."

"Yes, he has been quite an invalid," corroborated Miss Loomis, with the air of confiding a matter of importance.

"I am so sorry," said Mrs. Brentwood.

"I often find it very difficult to leave him," continued Mrs. Iverson.

"Yes, indeed, my sister finds it difficult to leave him," said Miss Loomis; "he depends so much on her. I often offer to relieve her by reading aloud to him, but she says he prefers her voice."

"Yes, he prefers my voice," said Mrs. Iverson, with eyes that seemed to grow luminous at the thought. Mr. Iverson was evidently a power to be reckoned on.

She turned the conversation away from the subject, however, as she smiled over at Winifred and Audrey though it was evident that it still occupied her thoughts. "I have never met your daughters before, Mrs. Brentwood."

"No; we went to Europe last spring, soon after you came here," said Mrs. Brentwood. She flushed as she always did at the recollection of that miraculous trip, as she went on impulsively: "We had the time of our lives! We were gone two whole months, not counting the voyage. We had none of us, not even Mr. Brentwood, ever been over before. Absolutely, we went around *thrilling!* But luncheon is ready. Will you come into the next room,

across the hall?" She led the way, still talking as the party took their places, with the iced fruit in the tall amber glasses already in place.

"You have been over, I suppose, Mrs. Iverson?"

"Yes; my sister and I were educated abroad, and I have been across with Mr. Iverson every summer for the past fifteen years, except this year," said Mrs. Iverson gently. Her brows knitted again. "But there is such a sameness about it. I don't think it is much of a rest to him; my husband dislikes strangers. Of course you had your daughters with you. It must have been very pleasant," she went on, with a smile at the younger part of the community.

"Yes, it must have been very pleasant," coincided Miss Loomis, with her bright air of saying something original.

"Oh, mother never could have got along without us," said Winifred, with a glance over at the tall fruit-glasses before the two guests. Lucia Bannard and the family were emptying theirs with evident enjoyment, but the others seemed to be only dallying lightly with theirs.

"I used to wish that I had daughters, but it is perhaps just as well that I have my boys instead," pursued Mrs. Iverson, "Girls take up so much of one's attention; they have to be

looked after, of course, and with Mr. Iverson in his present state of health it would have made things very difficult." The strained expression deepened. "With boys it is very different: they have their own lives."

"Your youngest is at Groton?" hazarded Mrs. Bannard.

"Yes, at Groton. My eldest son, Leslie, is an electrical engineer out West. When he comes home, I try to make things as gay for him as possible. Mr. Iverson thinks a home should be made attractive for a young man, but it is sometimes difficult. Of course Mr. Iverson mostly keeps in his own apartments at such times, and I always have a trained nurse on hand in case he should need some little attention that I cannot give him at the moment; but he seems to think no one can take my place."

"No one can take her place!" volunteered Miss Loomis effectively.

"Audrey and I met your son a couple of weeks ago, when we were in Denver," said Winifred, a little pink colour coming into her cheeks.

"Indeed!" said the mother. She regarded Winifred evidently without seeing her. A little haze grew over her eyes. "I should like to travel in the West so much, but Mr. Iverson does not care for travelling."

The conversation turned on California, which

Lucia Bannard had lately visited, and wandered still further afield; but the talking got laboured when it left Mr. Iverson. There seemed no other point of real contact with the star guests. The sense of chill began to grow deeper. They dallied with their oysters as they had with their fruit, eating little, and that with a sort of impersonal detachment about them. They had come out to perform a social duty, and they were performing it; but in spite of politeness it was evidently a nervous strain. They were oddly like recluses free from some hermitage for a few hours, politely striving to enjoy an unnatural liberty, with the atmosphere of the secluded life still around them. Winifred, in her young, clear-eyed impressionableness, got an unshaped yet not the less vivid sensation of some large, tormented personality behind the two women who absorbed all their individuality and yet wreaked itself unhappily on them, because all they gave was insufficient for the need.

Mrs. Brentwood was waiting in hopes of success in the next course, the chicken bouillon with whipped cream, somewhat long in making its appearance, when, after a sound of wheels outside, the noise of manly footsteps was heard suddenly in the hall, and Mr. Brentwood's large, handsome, grizzled head was thrust between the dining-room portières.

"I thought I'd come home to luncheon. That infernal ligament of mine —— Hello! I didn't know you were having company," he announced genially.

"I told you myself last night, Theodore," said Mrs. Brentwood, flushing with an exasperation such as one feels with a beloved child. She loved her husband whenever her eyes rested on him, yet she could have shaken him for coming in just now and disarranging everything.

"Come in, dear! Mrs. Iverson, Miss Loomis, my husband."

"Very glad indeed to welcome you here," said Mr. Brentwood heartily, shaking hands. "I haven't had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Iverson, but I hope to soon. Lucia, it's always good to see you!"

He was a man who always kissed his wife and daughters affectionately after even half an hour's absence. He proceeded to do it now, holding Winifred's hand tenderly in his as he went on speaking:

"Now don't let me upset the party; if there isn't any room for me, you can just send me a bite upstairs."

"You know you only say that for effect," said Winifred, saucily. She appealed to the tableful, her dark eyes, her scarlet cheeks and lips framed in the circle of his arm. "He's

the most pampered man! He'd never get over it if he thought we'd let him go off by himself and have our good time without him — would you, daddy dear?" She pulled his cheek down to hers for a moment with defiant pride.

"It was very, *very* bad of you to come home now, and you'll crowd us dreadfully, but as you're here ——" she was busy, as she spoke, helping the maid to lay another place. Everybody was moving up inconveniently close, with a confusion of doilies and glasses and knives and forks, and deprecatingly polite murmurs from the guests. The seventh chair could barely be edged in; Mr. Brentwood's large figure in his gray suit seemed to dominate everything as he beamed with courteous kindliness on the surrounding womankind, with apparent obliviousness of an uneasy, startled air that seemed to pervade Mrs. Iverson and her sister.

"I'd have been here before, Matilda," he apologized to his wife, "but I went out of my way to give that little sewing woman of yours a lift; I met her trudging down the road." Mr. Brentwood was always giving a "lift" of some kind to oppressed femininity. "But I've come in time for the broth, I see." He took a spoonful of his, and smiled jovially across the table. "That disposes of formality at once. People" — the eyes of Winifred, Audrey, and

their mother commingled in one agonized glance — "people, Mrs. Iverson, come for miles around to hear us drink soup."

Mrs. Iverson looked more startled; she seemed indeed to shrink a little, but she only said, "Indeed!" with an effort at response.

"Yes, it reminds me of that precept we were taught at school, 'Eat slowly *and* distinctly!' Ha! I believe I have made a slight mistake: it was, as you were going to remind me, Audrey, '*Read* slowly and distinctly,' but the principle's the same. Matilda, Miss Loomis would like to borrow some bread."

"Oh, no, no," murmured that lady as Ellen hastily passed the article.

"Well, I will then," said Mr. Brentwood, helping himself. "I never can see why my wife won't have the bread left on the table, as usual, when we have company. At all the best restaurants, both here and abroad, they leave the bread on the table where you can help yourself. Isn't that true, Mrs. Iverson?"

"I believe it is the custom abroad," said Mrs. Iverson, turning a delicate pink in an effort to respond. "But when we travel, Mr. Iverson prefers to have our meals served in a private room; his health demands quiet."

"Is that so," said Mr. Brentwood, with genuine interest. "Poor fellow, I'm sorry for him. I know what it is when this infernal

ligament of mine troubles me. But speaking of the food abroad" — he leaned forward deep in his subject, "I don't think it's what it's cracked up to be. We struck the plum season in England; nothing but stewed plums or plum tart every blessed day for a 'sweet' as they call it. A sweet indeed! At luncheon or dinner at the house where we were stopping, or when we were invited out, *plums*, I give you my word, just the same! I became" — the twinkle in Mr. Brentwood's eye heralded to the family the approach of a much-used pun — "I nearly became plumb crazy."

A sickly smile around the board put its hall-mark on the joke, and he went on with another:

"And the eternal string-beans! I used to say, in the words of the poet, 'I have bean here before.' Ha, ha!" He paused for appreciation before going on. "But I'd like to go over again. Ever heard the story of the man who bought a coat that was too short for him?"

"A coat that was too short for him?" repeated Mrs. Iverson painstakingly. "I really do not know."

"Father, you chatter so nobody gets a chance to say a word," protested Winifred. "You're taking an undue advantage of being the only man."

"Oh, pray tell the story!" murmured Mrs. Iverson nervously. "We are so interested."

"We are so interested," stated Miss Loomis officially.

"You see, my dear, Mrs. Iverson wants to hear it. Ellen, if you can spare me another glass of water! Well, he bought a coat, and the Irishman told him it was too short for him. 'Oh,' said poor Jim, 'but it'll be long enough before I get another!' And the Irishman thought that was so funny that he went off — Audrey, my dear child, don't fidget so, you can't be well — slapping himself and laughing, and he says to the next person he met, 'Me friend Jim has been saying the funniest thing yet. Bedad, when I told him his new coat was too short, he up and says: "It'll be a long time before I get another one!"' And he couldn't understand why nobody laughed with him. Well, it'll be a long time, I'm afraid, before I'll get another trip abroad." He stopped short. He glared darkly with sudden suspicion — his head reared back at a silver dish on a tray which Ellen was presenting at his left side. "What under the sun is *this*, Matilda?"

"Browned potatoes, dear," replied Mrs. Brentwood in a tone of dangerous calm.

"Oh," said Mr. Brentwood, happily relieved. "What are you looking at me that way for, Matilda? What have I done now?" He

helped himself largely, and then went on with a ruminative confidence to Mrs. Iverson: "I like potatoes in any way but cold." He shook his head retrospectively. "I never have a-ny use for potato salad; cold potatoes always remind *me* of cold feet." An icy thrill seemed to run visibly around the table to the agonized sense of the family before Lucia Bannard began to laugh hysterically, and they joined in, Mrs. Iverson and Miss Loomis palely smiling.

"But you're not eating anything, Mrs. Iverson," said Mrs. Brentwood a moment later in real concern; "nor your sister either!"

Alas, it was too true! They had seemed to eat without appetite before Mr. Brentwood's coming, but since that there had been hardly a pretence at it. What was the use of having the "best food ever" for guests who didn't appreciate it? Never had such a thing happened before. Nothing, nothing, could have turned out less as it had been planned for! "Why had they tried it at all?" Winifred moaned to herself.

After that last awful remark the conversation was left to Mr. Brentwood without any effort to draw it away. Mingled with a desire to shake this parent who was behaving like a naughty boy, was a feeling of resentment against these impossible Iversons for not being able to see how fine he really was; there could be no

further pretence of intimacy with Leslie Iverson's stupid, disapproving family. Something in those brown eyes of his seemed to speak, as it had on that last meeting, straight to young Winifred's soul, and she said now, in her heart: "Yes, I saw what you did, and I say good-bye to that something that drew us together. There will never be any opportunity for it to be more than a memory to both of us."

The guests seemed to grow more and more repressed, yet nervously almost furtive in their glances at each other behind the polite veil of punctilious attention which they gave their host. Their deference encouraged him to fresh efforts; he soared in his untrammelled invention.

Later, when he had Mrs. Iverson and Miss Loomis ensconced on the piazza, and after having brought them each the most beautiful late rose he could find, and the biggest Bartlett pears off his own tree, he arranged their cushions for them — although they were in nervous haste for their motor to come — and got the steamer rug to put around Mrs. Iverson with dexterous care, and that kind smile of his that was so heart-warming, in spite of her agitated protests, because he saw she looked chilly. After that he sat on the railing one leg over the other, and Winifred heard the fateful words:

"You know when I was a boy we never took

baths ——" He was beginning the Bath-Tub Story! She and her mother clasped at each other's hands secretly with an unheard moan. If he came to the Tooth-Brush Story —— He *was* coming to it.

The girl began to feel a fury at her visitors for being there at all. She never wanted to see Leslie Iverson again. She went up to her father when the visitors rose at last to go, and said her good-byes to them with her arm around him; and as the motor drove off he stooped and kissed his child as she clung to him. Though the Iversons had been so long in going, the swiftness of their departure at the last precluded all but the most hurried and perfunctory adieus; there was nothing said of any future meeting.

Contrary to their wont, the Brentwood family did not talk over the luncheon among themselves afterward. The best centrepiece and the doilies were put away, the fancy silver locked up again, things restored to their rightful places, but with no reference to the entertainment or what had happened at it. They had tried whole-heartedly to please, and they hadn't pleased; and it came to the place now when they didn't care whether the guests had been pleased or not. The Iversons had dropped out of their scheme of things.

Yet, unexpectedly enough, after all, two days

afterward they were surprised by a call from Mrs. Iverson. They were sitting on the piazza, Mrs. Brentwood sewing and the girls just back from tennis, when the big motor-car drove up and Mrs. Iverson stepped out alone. There was an air of animation about her, both in movement and expression, that was in striking contrast to her repressed manner before. She came up the steps with her hand already stretched out to clasp Mrs. Brentwood's, the anxious lines on her forehead seemed to have been smoothed away. There was a slight flush on her hitherto pale cheeks; her gentle eyes shone; there was a perceptible glow about her that seemed to come from some inner change.

"Please don't disturb yourselves. I'll sit down here beside you, if you'll let me," she said taking her seat by Winifred on the willow settee. "I can stay only for a moment, but I felt that I couldn't wait any longer before seeing you all. My sister is reading to Mr. Iverson. As he always says her voice is not mine, but he really *wished* me to come."

"Indeed, we appreciate it," responded Mrs. Brentwood, wondering somewhat.

The other put up a gloved hand of protest. "Oh, no, no, it is we who appreciate your kindness so much! I couldn't rest until I had told you what a delightful time we

had at your luncheon the other day. It is so long since we have been in a real home — with a *family!* Perhaps you don't realize what it is to see daughters with their father. And Mr. Brentwood! he was so brilliant, and so extraordinarily entertaining, and so kind ——" Mrs. Iverson's eyes filled with tears. "My sister and I were spellbound: we couldn't eat, couldn't say a thing; we felt so stupid, and we were simply spellbound! Mr. Brentwood reminded us so wonderfully of our own dear father, who died before I was married, especially when he told the story about the coat; it really quite *affected* Amelia and myself."

Mrs. Iverson paused for an instant. "And all his little attentions to us — he *was* so kind! But the thing that my sister and I felt most of all was how much Mr. Iverson would enjoy him. We have done nothing since but try and repeat Mr. Brentwood's clever sayings and anecdotes to my husband, and he is all impatience to meet Mr. Brentwood. He would have driven over with me to-day if he had been able, so I have come now to beg you to excuse the informality and be so very good, if you will, to dine with us, all of you, to-morrow evening. Mr. Iverson has so few pleasures, and he is anxious to meet you and Mr. Brentwood at once."

"My dear, we'll be delighted," said Mrs.

Brentwood warmly, but somehow it was Winifred's hand that the visitor was holding as she went on to say:

"And I want to engage you and your sister now — it's a little far ahead, but I cannot rest until I have an opportunity of returning some of the pleasure you have given us — I want to engage you both for a small house-party that I expect to have on the twentieth for my son, when he comes on for a few days; for I think you said that you had met him, Miss Brentwood?"

"Yes, I have met him," said Winifred, with shining eyes, and knew not what strange telepathy made the hitherto impersonal, repressed Mrs. Iverson draw Winifred's face to hers and kiss her.

If father had succeeded in having his little joke, this time it was on them!

Marie Twists the Key

Marie Twists the Key

"ARE you going to the Crandalls' to-night to meet that girl they have visiting them?"

Mrs. Chandor, a pretty, fair woman, paused once more before going out of Atkinson's to ask the question of Mrs. Paxton.

Atkinson's was the leading grocery, a most attractive spot with its gleaming glass jars of fruit and vegetables and bright tins of foreign delicacies piled up everywhere. On clear mornings you met almost as many people you knew passing in and out as if it were the Woman's Club. To-day, however, it was raining hard; in lieu of the usual motors and carriages outside there was only the Iversons' limousine with its swarthy foreign chauffeur speeding past, and so few people out with dripping mackintoshes and umbrellas that the fact gave an additional intimacy to any meeting. Mrs. Chandor and her friend, Mrs. Paxton, had been talking already fifteen minutes by the clock on the opposite wall.

"Why, I hardly think we'll be there — that

is, I told Mrs. Crandall when she called me up this morning that if Beverly wasn't too tired to-night when he came home we might go over for a while. But if it rains ——"

A succession of expressions seemed to flit suddenly over Mrs. Paxton's speaking countenance. She was a short woman, with a generous waist, a round face and a snub nose; but she had a very clear, fair skin, lovely roundish eyes of a very light blue, straying curly tendrils of light brown hair, and a dimple at one side of her rather large mouth. She had that matronly if still youthful appearance that gives the effect of having always been married; but sometimes, as now, when she smiled with puzzled eyes so that the dimple showed by her red lips, her face, under the straying brown tendrils, looked unexpectedly like that of a baby.

"The fact is, Mrs. Chandor, I half hope it will rain — it gives an excuse. It's next to impossible to drag Beverly out in the evenings now after he once gets home; he is kept downtown so late and is so tired — and to the *Crandalls'!*"

She stopped again expressively. The Crandalls' presented no gayety even to her willing mind. Every one liked them, but they were people who in their own narrow-doored, high-ceilinged, black-walnuted home didn't shine — neither kind, housekeeping Nell, nor choir-

singing Will, nor old Mrs. Crandall, with her black gloves and sloping shoulders and insinuating manner, seemed to know what to do with you when they got you there.

"I know," assented Mrs. Chandor feelingly. "I should think it would be a little dull for Miss Davis. She's just come from some army post out West — I forget the name; but before that she lived all over Europe. Her mother married again and Miss Davis has come back to America to make her own way. Her father was some connection of Will Crandall's. They say she's very accomplished."

"I'd like to see her," responded Mrs. Paxton vaguely. "Well, I must go!" They had been talking in the doorway for the last few minutes, and she raised her umbrella now with an air of finality. "Good-bye."

She wondered with compunction as she went home whether it sounded as if she had been complaining of Beverly. Things indeed had come to that pass that the mere mention of any invitation either raised in him an almost vituperative storm at the people who had asked them, so that his wife was obliged to insist that it hadn't been meant as an insult, or else caused him to say resignedly, with tired eyes: "All right, all right! I'd give anything to stay home quietly this evening — it's been the hardest day in six months; but if you say so,

Dorry, of course I'll go." The times that she had to insist on his keeping an engagement made her more miserable than him. His fastidiousness too often made him unduly critical of the village entertainments — he was wont to thank Heaven when they were over.

Perhaps it was no wonder that after Mr. Paxton's business day in town — as dim and far off to Mrs. Paxton's understanding as to that of most women, as if he had taken his daily train to and from Mars — the comfort of his home should appeal ineffably to a brain-and-body worn-out man.

Dorothy Paxton had no artistic sense, like Lucia Bannard, but she had an abounding gentleness and reposefulness like the fruit from a Horn of Plenty. Her soft plumpness seemed typical of a generous softness of nature; she had that sixth sense which consists in knowing how to make a man comfortable.

It was not only that his dinner was always appetizing — Mrs. Paxton never indulging in those "off" meals in which there is nothing anybody wants to eat — the evening lamp at its most perfect angle by the sofa, the fire at its brightest, the cosiness of the winter evening nestlike after the pretty children had come in to bid him good night in strainingly affectionate little arms — it was not only these material charms that appealed, but the mere

presence of Mrs. Paxton in a house gave a sense of pervasive warmth, an all-embracing loving-heartedness in which the spirit basked. Her absence left an aching void. Mr. Paxton's hungry "Where's mamma?" conveyed its own message to her children's sympathetic ears.

Yet sometimes — it were vain to deny it! — Mrs. Paxton felt secretly that she didn't get quite so much out of this partnership as she should. It is hard to quench effectively the inherent sense of justice even in the heart of the most loving woman. If Beverly were satisfied it was perfunctorily taken that she must be. If what she did for him failed to awaken him to an equal care for her in little things, the only way she knew to meet his inadequacy was to take thought for him even more generously. It was Mrs. Paxton's simple creed that the more you did for any one the more they must naturally want to do for you. Why, if she received the least little kindness from a friend she couldn't rest until she had done something kind too; it wasn't so much in the nature of a payment as an equal privilege. She enjoyed getting out in the evening, and Beverly knew it; it was a change — a soul-lift in the unvarying round of her domestic days. In her meditations she had plans for reforming him that came to naught —

convincing talks that never materialized. She had had even those wild flights of fancy that may come unsuspectedly to the most married, in which she saw herself, after the way of the heroines of fiction, coquettishly charming her husband's renewed and loverlike interest to her by being very attractive to some other man. Mrs. Paxton was, however, no fool; even if there had been any man who wanted to captivate or to be captivated, she had herself seen that in real life the spectacle of a flirting wife didn't draw a husband's interest to her pleasingly — it only irritated him and made him like her less. There seemed to be no effectual way. Yet when one can foresee only baffling effects from all one's efforts, circumstances may unexpectedly step in and give a twist to the key that unlocks the gate to a different road.

As the day wore on toward night and the rain came pouring down more and more blackly in chill, rushing torrents, she was thankful that it was, after all, to the Crandalls' that her regrets would be telephoned when her husband reached home, rather than to some more attractive place. Nothing could have sent Beverly forth again on such a night.

She was putting the finishing touches to her simple blue house-gown when she heard him run up the steps, and leaned over the balus-

trade to call "I'm up here, dear," before he could ask little Gertrude, who opened the door for him, where mamma was.

"You're home early to-night," she said happily, lifting up her face to be kissed after he had come loping upstairs to her.

"Yes," assented her husband. He was a somewhat thickset man of medium size, with a long, smooth-shaven face, rather small eyes, a handsome nose and mouth, shining hair and very small ears and hands and feet. His wife was very proud of his aristocratic appearance. He had an unusual animation now in his eyes and voice.

"I thought I'd get home in time to dress before dinner." He paused in evident wonder at his wife's astonished glance. "Why, didn't you get the invitation? Miss Marie Davis — I went in with her and Crandall this morning — said that Mrs. Crandall was going to call you up the first thing."

"Miss Davis! Yes, I got the invitation, but I'd no idea that you would go," responded his wife blankly. "I thought, of course, on account of the rain and everything you wouldn't want ——"

She stopped; her husband was sitting down on the lounge, already drawing off his shoes.

"Oh! The rain doesn't amount to much," he announced absently. "We'll telephone for

Docherty's hack if you want it." His eyes kindled reminiscently. "Have you met Miss Davis?"

"No."

"Curious history she must have had. Her mother's been married three times, or maybe it's four — a regular old Henry the Eighth, I call it! Crandall says that poor girl has been dragged all over the world. Once they were so poor she had to sing in the streets of Budapest — I think it was — to get money to buy medicine for her mother when she had the pneumonia. Crandall says her eyes fill with tears when she speaks of it. You can see that she longs to have a life like other girls, quiet and domestic. Her stepfather, the count, is rolling in money, but she won't live with them."

"Why not?"

Mr. Paxton shook his head and pursed his lips significantly. "Don't ask me! If you want to know, I think she's too attractive. She gives you to understand — delicately, of course — that her looks have always been a drawback to her. She hates foreigners."

"Well, if you're going to shave I think you'd better not stay here talking any more," said his wife sensibly. She went to the wardrobe and took out, after a moment's hesitation, her best, brand-new trained evening gown of lacy black, trimmed at the neck with cerise

velvet, which was very becoming to her fair skin and made her figure almost slim.

The thought of wearing it gave a pleasant sense of excitement. She would dress after dinner. She reached the foot of the stairs just as the maid was opening the door for Donald Bannard, who, with a dripping umbrella left outside, proffered one neatly furled.

"Good evening, Mrs. Paxton. I'm bringing back this umbrella we borrowed of you. Lucia thought you might need it to get to the Crandalls'."

There was a peculiar light in his always merry eyes. "You're going, aren't you?"

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Paxton, "unless Beverly backs out before the time comes."

"Oh, Paxton will be there! Have you seen the fair Marie?"

"No."

"Well, she's a winner, believe me!" Mr. Bannard shook his head with a smile of delighted remembrance. "That girl had every man around her on the station platform this morning. You should have seen old Brentwood! I told him he was a disgrace, and he had the face to say that I was jealous of him. Well, good evening; I'll see you later."

"Thank you for the umbrella," said Mrs. Paxton sedately. She felt puzzled and dimly aloof. The girl somehow didn't sound attractive.

She was forced to alter her opinion, however, when she reached the Crandalls'. There was a different air about the house at once noticeable; a buzz of conversation smote the ear on entering, an unusual excitement was evident, not only among the guests but in the bearing of the family. Even old Mrs. Crandall, with her neatly banded coal-black hair, her black gloves and her genteel manner, showed it. The cause was revealed when Nell loudly announced: "Marie, I want you to meet Mr. and Mrs. Paxton — my cousin, Miss Davis."

"Oh, Mr. Paxton and I are old friends already," said Miss Davis in a deep voice, slipping lithely toward them from a group of men, her head thrown back and both hands outstretched. It seemed a wonder that she could move at all; her white satin skirt was so narrow that it almost appeared, in a back view, as if she were sitting down when she was really standing up. She was the slimmest, whitest creature Mrs. Paxton had ever seen, but her eyes were enormous and dark, with violet circles below, and black eyebrows above; her mouth was very red, and her hair, of which she seemed to have pounds, was of a metallic golden colour; waved on top, it stuck out in an immense banded knob a quarter of a yard from the back of her head. If her appearance was foreign, her voice and accent were not — she had evidently kept her Western

burr through all vicissitudes. She went on now after her greeting to Mrs. Paxton:

"Your husband and I went into town together this morning. He is such a dear fellow, isn't he?"

"Now, now, now!" protested Mr. Paxton with a laugh, "Miss Marie, you mustn't say that before me!"

"And why not?" asked Miss Davis. She turned her cheek toward him, with her head still thrown back and her eyes looking from under her drooped eyelids. "I know my friends often say to me: 'Marie Davis' — she pronounced it Murree — 'you are too frank.' But I believe in being frank with men — that is, of course, if they're the right kind. Then you know just where you are. Don't you think so, Mr. Bannard?" She turned to that gentleman and Mrs. Paxton passed on, although the latter noticed, after a moment, that her husband was not with her.

There were no men among the women sitting or standing around the room, with the exception of young Leslie Iverson, whose engagement to Winifred Brentwood had just been announced, and who had eyes for nobody but her. Will Crandall stood on one side of the door keeping watch on the group around Miss Davis. Mrs. Paxton had been fascinated by the sight of her own figure, almost unbelievably slender in

the modish black and cerise gown, but by the side of the Crandalls' visitor she felt dull and solid. If it was any satisfaction, all the other women, even Lucia Bannard, looked the same. They seemed merely as background for the dazzling, metallic brilliancy of the fair "Murree."

"What do you think of her?" murmured young Mrs. Wilmer in a tone that left an opening for confidences.

"She seems very attractive," said Mrs. Paxton.

"Yes, doesn't she?" agreed Mrs. Wilmer. "Old Mrs. Crandall was telling us how accomplished she is. She played the banjo before the king of — I've forgotten the name of the country, but he's a real king just the same — and he was so enraptured that he gave her that green bracelet she's wearing; but old Mrs. Crandall says that she is still a simple American girl."

"Old Mrs. Crandall was very intimate with the grandmother," chimed in the matronly Mrs. Brentwood. "Mr. Brentwood met Miss Davis this morning; he's always so sorry for a girl who has to make her own way— he feels that he has daughters himself, you know."

"Oh, Mrs. Paxton!" called Miss Davis' deep voice, as she approached with a following of black-coated figures. "I want to ask if your husband is truthful."

"Probably not," said Mrs. Paxton with a gleam in her baby-blue eyes.

"There, what did I tell you, you bad man!" cried Miss Davis, gazing at him provocatively. "But I forgive you for trying to impose on me. Captain Spears, out at the fort, used to say: 'Murree, anybody can get around you; you're too warm-hearted.' But I'm glad I am; I wouldn't be as cold as you are for anything. Yes, when a man has as small feet and hands as you have, Mr. Paxton, you may be sure he has a cold heart."

"Now, now, now!" expostulated Mr. Paxton, laughing, but, as his wife felt wonderingly, fatuously pleased instead of repelled. "Cold, indeed! Put your little hand by the side of mine. There — mine would make four of yours; wouldn't it, Wilmer?"

"These big strong men!" said Miss Davis admiringly to the world at large. "I'm afraid of you! Although after the way you saved my life this afternoon, Mr. Wilmer ——"

"Saved your life?" interrupted young Mrs. Wilmer unwarily. "I hadn't heard of that!"

"Oh, shucks! It was nothing," objected Mr. Wilmer hurriedly. "That black-faced chauffeur of the Iversons' lost control of his machine for a moment just as Miss Davis was crossing the street, that was all that happened."

"All! If you hadn't put your beautiful

strong arm around me I would have slipped under the wheels," said Miss Davis, shuddering coquettishly. Her white face and arms, her white satin gown, and her metallic hair caught new light as she shuddered.

"I'll be there next time to see that you don't slip," affirmed Mr. Paxton jovially. "Wilmer takes an unfair advantage."

"Very attractive girl, isn't she?" said Nell Crandall later in the evening, to the row of women sitting somewhat stiffly on the walnut chairs under the dim oil paintings. There was a hint of growing uneasiness in her manner at the continued bursts of loud laughter from the other end of the room, where Miss Davis had effectively kept all the men. Having just finished a song with the alluring refrain of "Kiss — Kiss — Kiss," she was now re-arranging Mr. Paxton's necktie for him. "So fresh and unspoiled — a perfect child! in spite of the career she has had in courts and everything. She said to me just this morning: 'Cousin Nell, I act as I feel. I cannot help being natural.' It makes her unusual, of course, but ——" Nell paused for a moment uncertainly — "very attractive, we think."

"Oh, very," assented Mrs. Brentwood, while young Mrs. Wilmer fanned herself, though it was not warm.

"I shouldn't call her a child," she asserted dryly when Nell had gone.

But afterward the male members of the party came once more into view, ranging themselves round the walls as Miss Davis appeared in a new rôle. Standing under the chandelier in the middle of the room in her white satin gown, she wriggled from side to side, bent forward and back, waved her arms, clasped them over her bosom, rolling her large eyes the while, to a laborious, stumbling accompaniment played by Nell. Old Mrs. Crandall, with a worried expression, going from guest to guest, explained in her most refined tone that it was an Eastern dance that dear Marie was giving. "Her grandmother," said old Mrs. Crandall, "was a beautiful dancer, though in a different way. It is wonderful, here in our little town, to feel the customs of the East brought so near to us as in this dance of dear Marie's."

"I don't call it a dance; I call it a squirm," said young Mrs. Wilmer bluntly when old Mrs. Crandall had gone. It might be Eastern, but it was also at times embarrassing.

When the dance was finished Miss Davis held out her long white arms toward Mr. Paxton, and they whirled rapidly together among the impeding furniture and guests, her head with its metallic hair resting on his black-coated shoulder. Mr. Paxton was a good

dancer, though it was long since his wife had sampled his perfections in that line.

It had come to that pass to Dorothy Paxton's wondering observance that however the fair Marie might be surrounded by the jesting crowd, Beverly, the quiet and fastidious, was always the nearest to her, his laugh the loudest, his attentions the most hilariously persistent. Mrs. Paxton began to feel an odd chill little contempt for her husband; couldn't he see, in spite of the glamour thrown round her, how common the girl was? Her eyes wandered thoughtfully to the corner where Leslie Iverson had no eyes for any one but Winifred Brentwood. He was only engaged. She had a dim perception that to the husbands this was a sort of unreal, intoxicating Arabian Night's Entertainment in the suburban monotony of married life.

But it was after supper, at which the strongest refreshment served was grape-juice, and during which seven men had shared Miss Davis' cake with her, that the climax came to this particular Arabian Night. Every one seemed to be standing up, grouped in the narrow doorways, when the fair Marie started to go upstairs for a photograph of herself in Turkish costume which every one had been clamouring to see. She stopped, however, on the lower step to say, with a plaintive droop:

"These dreadful stairs! They spoiled me so at the fort, I never walked up once while I was at Captain Spears'; either he or Lieutenant Pike insisted on carrying me. But of course I don't expect such attentions out of the army."

"See here, are we going to lie down on a dare like that?" asked Mr. Wilmer, laughing immoderately.

"I should think not," amended Mr. Brentwood gallantly. "If it were not for my years I should certainly offer my services."

"Oh, but I'm a great deal heavier than you think," protested Miss Davis with an alluring fall of her long lashes.

"Heavy! Do you hear that, Chandor?" asked Donald Bannard, slapping his friend on the back. "Just wait a moment, Miss Marie. Chandor will run up and down with you in five seconds."

"Oh, I don't want to step ahead of everybody else," said Mr. Chandor. "I'll give you a chance, Donald."

"No, I'm referee. How about Paxton? He's crazy for the opportunity."

"Yes, how about Paxton?" came in deep-voiced chorus.

"All right, that suits me," agreed Mr. Paxton with the air of a hardy rover. "Time me!"

There was a general cheer. Mrs. Paxton,

looking from her place in the outer circle, saw Beverly, her husband, snatch up the willing captive in both arms, her head hanging backward, her eyes closed and her teeth shining between her red lips, and dash up and down again, while Mr. Wilmer held the watch.

"By Jove! You are heavier than you look," he said with genuine surprise, as he set her on her feet again and a derisive shout proclaimed that he had failed. Her slipper fell off and he jammed it on her tiny foot. "That isn't fair. You ought to let me have another show!"

The mirth grew uproarious. Beverly was laughing incessantly, as was every one else, yet with a glittering eye, a hint of eagerness under his laughter, that wasn't perceptible in the other men. Old Mrs. Crandall, with a still more worried expression than before, was circulating elegantly round with anecdotes of the young woman's grandmother; Nell was anxiously repeating to unheeding ears how much of a child and how natural Marie was; while Will Crandall, with glowering eyes, seemed to be muttering something unpleasant to his wife. There were, in fact, all the symptoms of uneasiness in regard to an uncontrollable guest. No one knew where this might stop.

Just as Mrs. Paxton came suddenly forward to her husband she caught sight of herself in a mirror opposite. The black and cerise gown

certainly set off her white neck and arms as she moved with dignified grace; her blue eyes were larger and more luminous, her cheek deeply rosed; she looked unexpectedly handsome, while she said pleasantly, yet in the tone no man disregards:

"I think we had better be carrying ourselves off now, Beverly. It is growing late."

"Oh, well — if you say so," returned her husband with reluctance.

"It's too bad to break up an evening like this," protested Donald Bannard.

"Oh, we'll continue it," said Mr. Brentwood with hospitable intent. "We'll have a series of evenings while Miss Davis is here, one at each house. I know you won't be able to keep Paxton away!"

"Not unless I'm put in irons," agreed Beverly. He openly squeezed Miss Davis' hand at parting, while she leaned forward very close to his face, her enormous, dark-circled violet eyes full of preposterous extravagant meaning as they gazed into his while his laugh answered her. If they had all been at the silly age, ignorantly untrammelled, the thing might have had an excuse.

"You're looking very well. Did you have a nice time to-night?" the husband asked his wife vaguely after they were home. He bent forward to kiss her, also vaguely, as if

some other emotion wrapped him round, and he saw her dimly yet agreeably through it.

"Oh, yes," she answered indifferently, bending over to pick up a glove so that the intended salute was lost.

As she lay on her bed that night, her mind luminously clear, she felt that if he had been fascinated by a woman who was really beautiful and charming, some one of his own kind, she could have understood, appreciated — nay, even though she might have been madly jealous, have yet genuinely sympathized with his infatuation. But to make an exhibition of himself over a girl so excruciatingly in bad taste, beneath all her tawdry, artificial attraction — yes, so flagrantly common as "Murree!" gave Dorothy not even any thrill of jealousy; it left her cold. She regarded her husband from a region remote and unattached, as if he were somebody she didn't know but rather disliked: he was somebody she didn't know if he could be attracted by a girl like that! To be sure, all the others had behaved foolishly, but not like Beverly — it was not the same.

She thought of him curiously, yet with indifference. The superstructure of her wedded life seemed to have crumbled; for the first time in nine years she felt a strange proud freedom of not being married to him at all, as if the children were only her children, her life

her own, something in which she herself no longer had any need to count on him or hang upon his pleasure. She slept calmly, with existence on this new stationary plane, and entered as calmly, after the first inevitable jar of waking, on the day.

If all the men on the station platform the next morning had a slight shamefacedness about them there was no wife to see its cause— even Miss Davis, contrary to expectations, was not there.

Neither, as turned out the following day, was she at the Crandalls'. All kinds of queer rumours were abroad, whispered by excited women as they grouped magnetically coming in or out of Atkinson's, or Bolt's Emporium. Lucia Bannard herself was authority for Mrs. Iverson, who had been obliged to walk into the village in default of the chauffeur with whom Miss Davis had gone off. It wasn't a real elopement; they had been married secretly a year ago and separated afterward. It was rumoured that there had been a disgraceful scene at the Crandalls' when he had jealously demanded his wife. It was rumoured that he had gone to kind Mr. Brentwood for money — it was rumoured that he was a Hungarian count — it was rumoured that he was a Russian nihilist. All that Mrs. Iverson could say was that, whatever else he might be he certainly wasn't a gentleman.

But Mr. Paxton heard no word on the subject from his wife. When he came home from town the following night, furtive-eyed, but loudly cheerful, to ask casually if she knew about that affair of Miss Davis and the chauffeur, she merely said, Yes, she did, listened to his comments politely and changed the subject. Later in the evening when the Bannards and the Chandors happened in, with the livened air and mental stimulus that a near-scandal brings to a suburban community, Mrs. Paxton, though hospitably disposed toward the conversation, kept entirely out of it. No word in derogation of the pyrotechnical Marie escaped her lips; what the girl had or hadn't done was as indifferent to her as her husband. She was conscious that he was secretly watching her; once he put his arm around her, an unusual manifestation of affection in public, but it brought no flush to her cheek.

As the days wore on, even to the hypnotized consciousness of a husband as a rule imperceptive to change, there was something oddly different about Beverly Paxton's wife. She was as attentive to his wants, as scrupulously careful of his comfort as ever, but the atmosphere had changed dully. Something ineffable that warmed and cheered and restored and tenderly covered all his imperfections no longer emanated from her presence. He was left, a

naked soul, to wander lost and alone among the elements.

It was toward the end of the week that she heard his step swinging up the walk with an unusual ring in it. When she went down to greet him he presented her, still furtive-eyed, with a large bunch of roses.

"I saw them in the Terminal and thought you might like them," he explained carelessly.

"They're exquisite. Thank you so much," said his wife nicely.

"And, by the way, I came out with Bannard to-night. I said we might go over there for a while this evening if you felt like it. We haven't been there for a long time."

"Aren't you too tired?" asked his wife remindingly.

"Oh, no! It'll do me good — wake me up," returned her husband with heartiness. "I was talking to Bannard. We think of making up a little party — he says his wife hasn't been out so much as she ought since the baby came. What do you think of coming in Saturday to dinner — there'd be the four of us — I can't get off in the afternoon — and going to the theatre afterward? What do you say to our having a little lark just among ourselves?" His arms were round her, his eyes searched hers. Underneath his jovial manner was a strain of anxiety and something more,

something far deeper, a confessing, yearning, loving note that spoke straight to her heart and set it beating. "Would you like it, my Dorry, dear?"

"Yes," she whispered, with large eyes fixed on him; it seemed as if in another moment the tears that were gathering there must fall unless she smiled. That crust of ice that had lain about her heart suddenly melted from the constant fire hidden all the time below — the flame that burned for him; a fire that cleansed away instantly some inexpressibly corroding hurt, while it took that new-found freedom forever from her.

Her husband put up one long finger to brush her chin and throat. "You have the whitest skin," he remarked with tender irrelevance.

"Miss Davis' was much whiter," said his wife demurely. It was the first time she had pronounced that woman's name.

"Miss Davis! Pshaw, she was all chalk," said Beverly Paxton in careless disdain. With the fatal facility of mankind the very remembrance of his thraldom was already joyfully fading. His wife had a wondering, lightninglike perception that what had meant so much to her all these days had, after all, been nothing to him except in so far as she had been affected by it. "I'll tell you my candid opinion if you want it — Mrs. Beverly Paxton is the handsomest and most attractive woman I know. You're the only girl in the world for me!"

Meeting the Dog.

Meeting the Dog

"IF YOU'RE looking for a house, Mrs. Wilmer, why don't you take the Merriam cottage? It will be snapped up before you know it. I hear that the Merriams are going to separate, but I'm not surprised. *I* think when a man begins to keep things from his wife you can always scent trouble ahead."

Mrs. Roberts rolled her fine eyes expressively, as she leaned forward in to the circle, letting her completed string of paper cherry blossoms fall into her lap. All the women gathered in Mrs. Brentwood's comfortable library were making floral decorations for a Japanese Bazaar — at the behest of Mrs. Bantry, an ardent president of the club — with more or less concealed discontent in the work at this busy time of the year, Mrs. Chandor having anxiously confided to her neighbour that little Lucile didn't have a petticoat to her name, and Lucia Bannard responded that she hadn't had a chance to wash her hair for a month. Every one looked up now as Ethel Roberts went on speaking:

"Don't you think, Mrs. Brentwood, that a

wife ought to be able to win her husband's confidence?"

"Why, I suppose so," said stout, kind Mrs. Brentwood, somewhat vaguely. For her own part she couldn't have kept her big middle-aged-boy of a husband from telling her everything if she tried: there had been weak moments when she had half wished that he wouldn't tell her quite so much! Her eyes and Mrs. Ridgely Ferguson's met, as if swayed by the same feelings, before her mind reverted to the facts mentioned.

"Are you sure about the Merriams?"

"Oh, yes! I heard it — let me see, I'll tell you when it was; it was the night after your husband met the dog, Mrs. Wilmer — we all thought it was quite an adventure! That was Friday, wasn't it?"

"When Jack met the dog! He didn't tell me anything about that," said young Mrs. Wilmer blankly, flushing the next moment up to the roots of her beautiful copper red hair.

"He didn't!" Mrs. Roberts looked astonished but instantly recovered herself. She was a woman of almost brutal tact; you couldn't escape from it; she soothed and sympathized and helped you up when you didn't want assistance, and made you seem horribly rude when you frantically repelled it. She went on now with winning sweetness:

"Of course he wouldn't — I understand Jack so well! he didn't want to frighten you, what with the struggle with the tramp and everything; and dogs can be so dangerous! He just slipped naturally into telling *me* about it as we walked along together from the train — it really seemed quite like old times once more as he said; such friends as we always were! Oh, it's quite right that none of us see him now the way we used to before he was married — we all know that he has eyes only for his charming young wife! You're not going so soon?"

"I must," said young Mrs. Wilmer, calmly, rising with apparent disregard of the secret glances levelled at her. She had a gentle manner which delusively covered at times the most incendiary feelings. "It's growing late."

"Indeed, it is," said Mrs. Iverson, rising. "My son will be coming home from town."

Every one began making preparations to go off in friendly groups and companies; only Clementine Wilmer, in her red-brown suit and hat, with its long drooping willow plume that matched her hair, hurried off by herself. She was tingling all over with wrath at Ethel Roberts; it was maddening to have her act as if she alone saw around a situation, when one knew far more about it one's self, but couldn't say so. She remembered with a superior smile her hus-

band's irritable remark after he had walked home with Mrs. Roberts last Friday:

"Why in time does Ethel always have that brute of a suitcase for me to carry whenever I meet her? I think Roberts goes on another train on purpose."

Why was she always hearing from Ethel how well every one knew Jack before he brought her here? She did not know that it was indeed almost a foregone conclusion that unless a youth grew up betrothed to his school-companion, he married out of the place; the intimate social notice focussed on his most ordinary attentions to a young woman usually crushing out the kindling flame in sensitive Man and sending him far afield.

Mrs. Wilmer's way led toward the two-family houses that with their green-topped roofs, and half-enclosed two-story verandas, stretched in a row monotonously down the block, with clayey patches of lawn in front, and bare, diminutive trees like lead pencils dwindling in sentinel line far along the curb that bordered the new, snow-sodden earth. She approached with a feeling of intense repulsion, increased by the discomfiture of the afternoon. Last summer, when in the ardour of the approaching wedding, the Wilmers had engaged the second floor of the seventh cottage, applauding themselves for their economy, a glamour had

hung over it that didn't exist now; it wasn't only that they had taken the wrong domicile — whose lower-floor family seemed to absorb eternal hordes of messy, loud-calling children in their front piazza and walk, instead of the neat, immaculately tenanted dwelling farther down — but that the Wilmers had reached that stage of matrimony when they burned for a house to themselves.

To enter this place now added to the revolt of Mrs. Wilmer's mind; she could hardly wait for her husband's return, as she donned her pretty lilac and white house-gown, and set to work getting the dinner — she was a good cook — in the absence of the maid. Mrs. Wilmer had charm, there was no doubt of that; there was a kittenish grace in the swift movements of her rounded figure; in a kitchen apron with a bib her piquant loveliness was as evident as in a ball dress. Unmarried men whom her husband brought to the house were moved by her charm, not to love of her, but to a fascinated leaning toward marriage itself; it was certain that Leslie Iverson, on his last visit from the West to his family, had proposed to Winifred Brentwood after a dinner at the Wilmers'.

Mr. Wilmer was wont to allude to his wife's red hair in delighted explanation of the fervidness of her likes and dislikes; the hair was of a beautiful copper colour, but the strain of red

was undoubtedly present; it showed now in the way she greeted her husband, holding off as he bent to kiss her. He was five or six years older than his wife, neither particularly good looking, nor tall, nor distinguished in any way, but he had strong, clasping hands, a direct eye, and a nice expression. Clementine often said with satisfaction that he was a "very man-y kind of man."

"No, I don't think I'll let you kiss me to-night. I'm perfectly furious at you! Your friend, Mrs. Roberts, has been giving me information about you this afternoon." Her voice rose tragically. "Why on earth, Jack, didn't you tell me about your meeting the dog?"

"Meeting the *dog!*" Mr. Wilmer held off, himself looking down at her perplexedly. "You're raving, Teen! I don't know anything about meeting a dog!"

"Yes, you *do!* Mrs. Roberts — I know she was the hopeless passion of your life! — said that you had an adventure with one. You told her about it the night you walked home with her and were so disagreeable afterward because you carried her suitcase."

"Oh, that!" said Mr. Wilmer, in undisguised relief. "Why, that was nothing — nothing at all! I give you my word I haven't thought about it from that minute to this." He sat down suddenly in a big chair and drew his wife

down on the arm of it. "I'll tell you now, if you want me to. There was a dog had hold of a cat, and ——"

"I don't want you to tell me now, after everybody else has talked of it! I refuse to listen. Do you know what you do, Jack Wilmer?" Clementine had her hand in one of his; she emphasized her words by soft thumps with the other little fist. "You go and tell everything to the first person that comes along, and then forget to say a word to *me* — and it's got to be stopped! It's bad enough to have every one telling me what you always liked, and how you took your coffee, and the care you need because you're so susceptible to cold" — a specially vicious thump emphasized the words — "without having to learn your affairs now from other people. There was your cousin's engagement that you never told me of, till I heard it from your mother — and the time you left the parcel in the train — and when you took Mr. Bannard to the doctor's, and — oh, I couldn't *count* the times! And this very afternoon, before the whole club, when Ethel Roberts spoke of your meeting the dog, and I didn't know about it — it made me look like such a fool! They all pity me; yes, they do!" The tears came in Mrs. Wilmer's shining eyes for a moment, but she laughed through them, audaciously, with a

lovely, glittering, rainbowlike effect. "No! Wait a moment. I'll give you fair warning. If I hear from any one else of your meeting any more — *dogs*, I'll get even with you. Do you hear?"

"You shock me," said Mr. Wilmer with ferocity. He pulled his wife down into his arms and kissed her fondly.

"Oh, I'll shock you a great deal more before I get through," she murmured, with her cheek pressed close against his.

"You won't have to. I promise to remember to tell you every single thing I know before I open my lips to any one else. Now, will that content you? Is dinner ready, Teen? — Then let's go in."

II

Yet, after all, it was only the next night, at the Japanese Bazaar that the incident occurred about which everybody talked so much afterward.

There was no place in the town to hold anything of a publicly social nature but Beamley Hall, which had been built, apparently, to thwart as nearly as might be, the requirements of those who had to use it. Its high ceilings and bare drab walls successfully defied any adequate attempt at decoration, while the floor space was almost maddeningly small; there were no dressing-rooms and no kitchen; the

heroic women in charge of the restaurant — a box-like room approached through a dark and narrow passageway — wrestled with untold difficulties in the way of heating and apportioning food, in the midst of unwrapping chill wet papers from melting pink blocks of ice-cream and sending them forth on relays of heavy stone china — as from unknown recesses of the earth, where gnomes might lurk — to satisfy the demands of patrons waiting at small tables bare of aught but the folded Japanese napkin, and a wilted flower in a glass vase.

The fact that it was a Japanese Bazaar, with all the glamour of being called the Feast of Cherry Blossoms, was supposed to give an air of novelty to the scene; but all the garlands of paper flowers couldn't conceal the fact that this was the same old Beamley Hall, or that the aprons, and the innumerable coloured bags, and the crocheted slippers, and the gilt-edged china and perfume taken on commission by the lady who had a friend in the business, were duplicates of articles displayed at past bazaars.

It gave one a momentary start indeed, when the figure in the gorgeous stork-embroidered kimono turned around to show the gentle, mousey face and spectacled eyes of Mrs. Neff, the wife of the cashier at the bank; familiar, matronly countenances and solid forms took

on no unsuspected enchantment from the foreign garb, but rather the contrary. The very young girls, who swooped and fled, and came again down the room, their arms around each other, were no more attractive than in their usual bizarre dress; Lucia Bannard, who was undoubtedly handsome, still looked handsome, though tired, as if she might have been cleaning house all day; Eleanor Chandor's delicate prettiness was eclipsed.

Only young Mrs. Wilmer showed the magic transformation. Her cherry-red lips, her small white teeth, her glowing red-brown eyes with the black curved arches above them, her lustrous skin, her burnished hair, and lightly swaying form under the rope of cherry blossoms, gained a new brilliance, a fire from the gold-embroidered robe with its jewel-like colours which encircled her, and the polished green jade pins on either side of her head. As she perched on the outer edge of the apron booth late in the evening, laughing and talking, both men and women seemed perforce drawn her way; her husband, hovering near, couldn't take his eyes off her.

The people who had got up the Bazaar went from table to table, buying; others, pausing reluctantly by a booth, after furtively asking the price of an article, fled; the husbands, a minority, were yet nobly in evidence, purchasing bluffly, with manufactured hilarity,

from pretty girls, and saying in secret to their wives: *When are we going home?* Mr. Brentwood, good man, having just conveyed his sixth party of tired workers to and from the restaurant, stopped now in front of lovely Mrs. Wilmer where she stood the centre of a group formed by Mrs. Iverson, her son, Leslie, and his pretty fiancée, Winifred Brentwood, with the Crandalls, the Bannards, the Chandors and a few more. Mrs. Roberts, in a scarlet kimono, leaned across to say with business-like sprightliness:

"Don't you want to buy out our table, Mr. Brentwood? We have these aprons and glass towels left, you see — such useful things!"

"All right, I'll take the bunch," said Mr. Brentwood shortly, with a sudden lapse of enthusiasm, throwing a bill on the table, and turning to his wife. "Most time to go home, isn't it, mother?" The next moment, with the instinct of a gentleman, he sought to make up for a seeming discourtesy.

"Just the very things for Winifred here, Mrs. Roberts; I'll hand 'em over for her housekeeping outfit; it looks as if she'd be able to use 'em before long, now. I suppose you know that Leslie's got a position here, and that he's not going back to the wild and woolly West at all?"

"Yes, indeed, I've been pouring forth my

congratulations ever since I heard it yesterday," said Mrs. Roberts.

"Oh, *isn't* it lovely!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilmer, impulsively. "To have you really stay with us, Winifred!" Her colour rose delightedly. "Why, perhaps we can live near each other. It seems almost too good to be true!" She had that strange feeling that comes to one suddenly in the midst of speaking that this was a subject in some incomprehensible way to be avoided; instinct warned her, but she wouldn't heed it. "How glad you must all be!"

"Yes, indeed!" said Mrs. Iverson, looking fondly at her handsome son.

"Your husband says I'll find out what work is, all right, Mrs. Wilmer," announced Leslie with a laugh.

"And how did it all happen?" pursued Clementine. "I'm crazy to hear. Are you going to be with the Electrographic Company?"

There was a sudden hush, an appalled silence. Mr. Wilmer, after a swift glance at his wife's face, straightened up with a military effect, as if to take all that was coming to him. It was Leslie's surprised voice that broke the stillness after a moment.

"Why, your husband got me a place with his firm, Mrs. Wilmer — a mighty good place, too! I supposed of course that he'd told you.

He's taken no end of trouble about it. I'm mighty thankful to him, I know that!"

"Oh, a place in *your* firm," said Mrs. Wilmer, gazing at her husband with a dazed expression. Her voice shook slightly, she flushed suddenly to the roots of her beautiful copper-coloured hair; one of her long jade pins, caught in the cherry blossomed post behind her, fell on the floor, and she stooped to pick it up. Her husband stooped for it also, a moment too late; she gave his coat-sleeve a furtive, furious little jab with it that pricked through the cloth to the skin. He started involuntarily; his jaw dropped, his eyebrows rose — unperceived by the others — in an extreme astonishment that turned the next instant into suppressed laughter.

"Husbands all need educating, don't they?" said Ethel Roberts with winning sweetness, rolling her fine eyes around the group, like marbles. "If you keep things from this dear little wife of yours, Jack, we'll *all* quarrel with you; I'll have to take you in hand, just as I used to, and lecture you myself."

"Ah, you see what the married man has to live up to, Leslie," said Mr. Brentwood, genially, while Mr. Wilmer tried vainly to catch his wife's eye.

Her whole slender person was electrically instinct with anger through all her wraps,

when they finally left the hall to go home; she sheered off far from him in the street; he caught her small, wildly-beating fists capably, and held them tight in one of his under her cloak, while the other steered her along.

"What a little spitfire!" he murmured laughingly. "That was a dig you gave me! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Teen, *I* wouldn't behave like that for anything! It's well for me that you don't live in a country where the women carry daggers in their belts! Why, I'll be afraid to go home with you in the dark, next. This is what comes of marrying a girl with red hair!"

"Let me go!" cried Clementine, wrenching away ineffectually.

"Let you go! I should think not." He tightened his hold, controlling the situation, as she felt, by main strength. His voice changed the next moment.

"What's the matter? Teen darling — you're not crying! A dear girl mustn't let herself be made unhappy by such a little thing as —— Why, you know perfectly well I wouldn't hurt a sweet wife for the world!"

"But you *have* hurt me!" The tears were raining down her face, and she rested it momentarily against his shoulder before holding off again. "You've hurt me dreadfully. What do you suppose all those people are saying about

me now?" She mimicked Mrs. Robert's tone. "'Dear Jack, it's evident that his wife is really no companion for him; he never seems to tell her *anything*. Of course he loses a great deal.' Oooh! And you promised me faithfully only yesterday —— How did it happen that you never told me about Leslie, when you knew I was so interested in him and Winifred?"

"Search me!" said Mr. Wilmer, deeply. "I give you my word that I thought I had told you, Teen." They had reached their own domicile, the moonlight spearing out the lead-pencil trees in thin black shadows down the street. As they entered their apartment after plodding silently up the stairs, he turned and faced his wife thoughtfully where she stood under the gas jet, in the jewel-like kimono, the light falling on her lovely up-turned face.

"I just remember now that I was thinking all the way home last night how pleased you'd be; honest! And then when I came in you began all that yarn about my meeting a dog, and Leslie went clear out of my mind and I never thought of him again. I'm awfully sorry. Let up now, Teen, dearest, won't you? Don't you think you've cried enough? Suppose we pretend it's over. I won't forget again."

"If you *do!*" threatened his wife tragically. She looked at him with swimming, appealing

eyes, and then flung herself upon his breast, and strained her warm arms tightly around his neck. "Oh, if you do, I'm afraid I won't love you any more!"

III

What force of suggestion is it that makes one so often succumb to temptation just after strenuous resolving to the contrary? It is as if the unusual concentration on a higher purpose left the subconscious mind an easier prey to habit. If one could be successfully put in a comatose condition — chloroformed, as it were — for ten days or two weeks, so that one's better resolutions might have a chance to subconsciously root themselves, one's further course might be much more satisfactory. Unfortunately, Jack Wilmer was not subjected experimentally to any chloroforming process.

The very next day after the Bazaar the Wilmers received one of those annual letters from an agent requesting to be informed at once as to whether they wished to take their two-family section for another year, as it was being already inquired for by other parties — an epistle which always produces a hurried, irritated state of mind and the feeling that the owner is only waiting to thrust in more desirable tenants. The Wilmers had for the last six

weeks gone through the disillusioning process of looking for the Perfect House at the Right Price. Most of the cheap houses to rent were new, boxlike affairs, miles from any station, or enormous mansard-roof dwellings in a state of decay. There was one in Vyner Street that *was* perfect, but the rent was ten dollars a month more than the Wilmers' outside limit, and had been reluctantly but firmly put out of mind. The Merriam cottage headed the list of houses that were really possible, but by Saturday morning a buoyant, contrary feeling had evolved regarding haste; they agreed that they wouldn't be forced into action yet; some more desirable house might be put on the market before they were obliged to decide.

As usual on the Saturday half-holiday Clementine went into town for luncheon and the matinée with her husband. There was still to her something of the character of an adventure in the journey through the lower tube and the walking along those downtown streets; Trinity Church, looming up suddenly in the open space between the buildings at either side, pointed the way to Romance by the path of Wall Street. The very air was different from that uptown; in the wind that gallantly unfurled a brilliant flag here and there, there was a flavour of the sea that swept the Battery Wall, farther down; the ocean-going clouds seemed set in a bluer sky.

Strange, that a section given over to the prison-bondage of offices should be filled with such suggestion of wide and luring freedom! But Mr. Wilmer's manner, when he came out of his inner office to greet his wife, was disappointingly hurried.

"I'm awfully sorry, Teen, but I can't go with you after all. There's a man here from the West — a customer — that I've got to take out to lunch."

"Can't you take me, too?" pleaded Mrs. Wilmer, trying to smile engagingly.

"No, I'm afraid not — he wants to talk business. There may be something in it for me. Here are the theatre tickets; get some one to go with you. I'll turn up for tea at the Venetia, if I can; if not, I'll look for you in the third car going out."

"Very well," said Clementine submissively, but with a depth of disappointment in the eyes which she lifted to her husband.

His answered hers, for the moment, tenderly. "I'll see you to the elevator," he suggested. He pressed her hand furtively as he hastened her along the corridor. "I'd have telephoned you if I'd had time, but everything has been on the jump this morning."

"Any news?" she inquired.

He looked at her with a strained expression. "News? Not that I know of. What is it,

Blicker?" He paused as a youth delivered a message. "Tell him I'll be there at once. . . . Here's your car, Teen; mind the step, dear. Good-bye!"

He was already sucked away from her in the whirlpool of the business world before she was out of sight.

She ate a solitary luncheon and annexed a stray and uninteresting cousin for the theatre. It was an unexpected pleasure later, on reaching the Venetia, although her husband wasn't there, to be hailed by a party of women already seated by a red-candle-lighted table; Mrs. Chandor, Lucia Bannard, Mrs. Crandall, and Mrs. Roberts, very much plumed and white gloved, with a chair beside them piled high with cloaks and muffs and chain bags.

"Well, if here isn't another one! You've come just in time, Mrs. Wilmer. Waiter, bring another chair; there's plenty of room. You never can come in here on Saturday afternoon without meeting some of the crowd."

"This is really very comfortable, not too near the orchestra," said Elinor Chandor happily after all the orders had been given. "What did you see this afternoon, Mrs. Wilmer? Did you have a pleasant time?"

"Why, I expected my husband to be with me," returned Clementine, an unconscious note of wistfulness creeping into her voice. "I

went to his office, but he was too busy to get away."

"I never feel as if they were really as busy as they say they are. I believe they can always get away if they really want to," remarked Mrs. Crandall placidly.

"Oh, if you went to Jack's office, Mrs. Wilmer," cried Mrs. Roberts, "of course, then he told you!" Her big dark eyes rolled over toward Mrs. Wilmer. "I wasn't going to breathe a word, if you hadn't seen him. I think it is *so* mean to tell another person's special news before he has a chance to!"

"We will be so glad to have you for a neighbour," said Mrs. Chandor.

"A neighbour!" repeated Mrs. Wilmer, unwarily.

"It certainly was fortunate that Jack heard about those other people on his way to the train and went and had it all settled up at once with the agent, or you would have lost the chance altogether," continued Mrs. Roberts to Mrs. Wilmer's mystified expression. "That was how he happened to go in to town with me on the 9:04. He was so sweet about carrying my bag, though he said he would be terribly late at the office. I told him that now he had taken the Merriam cottage ——"

"Taken the Merriam cottage!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilmer involuntarily.

"Why, didn't he tell you?" asked Mrs. Roberts. She stopped short, staring; Mrs. Chandor looked at her plate. Mrs. Wilmer's face evolved after an instant's strange contortioning into a brilliant, superior smile of comprehension and amusement. Nobody would have guessed that her circulation had nearly stopped with the effort; her hands were icy chill as she went on brightly:

"Isn't Jack the most absurd fellow!" She appealed to the tableful at large, tingling suddenly with the audacious resolve to conquer this situation anyway. "Half the time when people *question* him" — she paused imperceptibly — "he doesn't know what he answers! He gets more and more absent-minded every day. No wonder I was surprised when you spoke of the Merriam cottage, Mrs. Roberts; it is the Vyner Street house that we have taken!"

"The Vyner Street house!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, bewilderment in her tone. She stuck to the point. "Aren't you mistaken? He certainly told *me*—— He said the Vyner Street house was much too expensive."

"It certainly is," agreed Clementine. "There are occasions, however, when a man feels it best, you know, to make the effort." She turned laughingly to the others. "I see that Mrs. Roberts doesn't quite believe me, but I assure

you that it is the Vyner Street house — and I ought to know."

"Well, if you *will* put me in such positions, I have to do something to defend myself," said Clementine impishly, later, as she ended her recital to her husband. She was sitting in the third car with him.

"Oh," said Mr. Wilmer. When she had reached her climax his jaw had fallen and his eyebrows lifted in the same astonished fashion as when she had stuck him on that other occasion with her jade pin. He regarded her now thoughtfully. He had a masterful way at times of holding her hands down spiritually as well as literally; she was too dear to be allowed to work her untrained will. There was a softening through his inscrutable gaze as he met her dazzling red-brown eyes, full of elfish defiance; her red-brown willow plume danced over the copper brown hair with its strain of red; her face, with its cherry lips and white teeth, seemed full of tantalizing, provocative light as she poured forth fiery, disconnected sentences. Every man around appeared to be buried in his newspaper, yet every eye, Jack felt was drawn her way.

"Nothing has gone right since you began by meeting the dog! I'm not going to care for you any more! I'll pay that extra rent out of

my allowance; I won't buy any more clothes for a year. If you think I could possibly live in the Merriam cottage after —— That woman sets my teeth on edge; I can't stand her. Can't you *see* that I had to get the best of her?"

"Yes, I see," said her husband deliberately. While she talked he had perhaps been planning ways and means of getting out of one contract and into another; the man from the West had meant a good thing. "But why do you speak of giving up your allowance, Teen? Of course you knew I would make sure where the money was coming from when I took the Vyner Street house."

"Before you took it!" Clementine gasped. "*Did* you take it, then?"

"Am I not telling you?" asked Mr. Wilmer, with masculine dignity.

"But Mrs. Roberts *said* ——".

"For Heaven's sake, Teen, drop Ethel Roberts! You've got her on the brain. I never told her a single thing about the Vyner Street house, I give you my word of honour. Can't you understand that I'm telling *you*, for the first time, *now?* If she was gassing about the Merriam cottage I can't help it, can I? You'd better call a halt, Teen, after this; you see once for all, how foolish you are to think I don't tell you things. I hope the Vyner Street house satisfies you; it certainly does me."

"But I don't understand!" said Clementine, helplessly. The train was already jarring into the station, but she paused as she rose.

"Do you mean to say — why, it's all perfectly ridiculous! You have me so *twisted*, Jack, on purpose ——— Mrs. Roberts — you think you have the best of me, but ——"

"The incident," said Mr. Wilmer, magisterially, "is closed. I wish to hear no more about it. Come on, Teen!" A triumphant and dancing gleam showed itself momentarily in his eyes as he bent over to help her down the high step. "Now will you be good?"

Marrying Willow

Marrying Willow

"I THINK Willow should be *told* that she ought to marry him!" Mrs. Bantry, a very stout, black-haired woman in brown, spoke emotionally.

The few members of the cooking lecture class, just out from an ineffective Thirty Minutes with the Saratoga Chip, stood on the corner of Main Street, the differing feathers in their hats all wildly blowing, as they talked in an intimate group before parting: they were all matrons, though of various ages, from the bridal Winifred Iverson to her mother, Mrs. Brentwood. The attendance on Miss Willow Walter's Talks, on whatever subject, from the Minor Prophets to her present cooking series, had dwindled alarmingly of late, only the inner circle of the faithful remaining to pay that pitiful two dollars for the course.

"It does seem to me that when things have come to this pass—" Mrs. Bantry was going on more emotionally. "What income there was, stopped when her father died; and now I hear that the house—they never paid any

taxes on it — is to be torn down to make way for the new street. They're going to rebuild the Guild room, so she has to give up her Talks, though that's no loss to *me:* she may know about the Prophet Ezra, but she knows nothing about cooking; besides, as Mr. Bantry always says, there is *no* nourishment in a Saratoga Chip! But how that poor girl is going to get along I don't know; in these days women know *how* to do things, and she doesn't. I heard for a fact that last week that she lived on a dollar forty-nine" — Mrs. Bantry paused with agitation. "I couldn't sleep last night thinking of it. Of course she's so close-mouthed she never tells you a thing. And she's so unbusinesslike! If you do her the least little kindness she goes and buys you flowers! And just now — when she seems to have come to the jumping-off place — to have a perfectly good, respectable man like Mr. Porch offer to marry her — he's not rich, but he can lift her out of this awful struggle — *I* call it Providential!"

"Of course, Mr. Porch is — well, of course, we know he's 'not *quite*,'" ventured the elder Mrs. Iverson. "Not quite," was her delicate synonyme for those in a slightly lower scale of refinement. "But every one says he is a *very* excellent man; he is so good to his mother; and I have always heard that very

large ears are a sign of a generous disposition. It is rather a pity, perhaps, that he has so many children, but ——" She broke off with a sigh. "Mr. Iverson always admires Willow's air and manner, and he says she is so restful; although he is slightly deaf, he can always hear everything she says."

"Well, I think Mr. Porch is a very nice man indeed. I shall never forget how kind he was that time I was trying to get Ellen into the hospital," said Mrs. Bannard emphatically. Lucia was a very handsome young woman with dark eyes, glowing cheeks, and an impulsive manner. A vision of the solid Mr. Porch with his sandy hair and gray suit materialized before her. "If Willow — hush. here she comes now."

They all stood looking after Miss Walters a moment as she passed swiftly by, as usual, with that effect of flying from something that pursued her. When a person wears overshoes on a perfectly dry day, there can be but one interpretation of the act; the meagre black jacket and hat showed poverty in every line, though she carried her tall, very thin figure with a peculiarly graceful ease, her small head drooping slightly to one side. Her small face was colourless, and her pale lips drooped also slightly at the corners. She had, however, very beautiful blue eyes veiled by

a misty haze, through which she seemed to be striving to understand Life. They had at times an indefinably helpless and pathetic expression which appealed to the inherent chivalry of every married man who knew her.

Colourless as she seemed, she had had the strangely startling experience of once being engaged for a short time to a young Englishman, an attractive, delicate fellow, who was found afterward to be married; he swore he had thought his wife was dead. Those who knew told of the telegram received by Willow — a lightning stroke — and that anguished parting afterward between the miserable lovers. Willow had been found lying face downward on the matted floor of the sitting-room by the faded green rep lounge, with the lengths of black stovepipe overhead. An odd flavour of romance had clung to her since from the fact that she passionately refused to hear him blamed, flying into incongruous, shattering tears and fury at any hint of it. It seemed to show something — a spirit of daring, perhaps — different from what any one would expect in Willow. The wife had really died afterward, but he had married again in Australia.

Ever since then Willow had lived, gentle, repressed and reticent, in a tumble-down house with an incredibly old father, who seemed to have lost all power of human companionship

in the mere tottering effort to live, until his death a year ago.

"I met Willow Walters in town to-day," said Donald Bannard that night as he sat in the cosy, red-curtained upstairs sitting-room, smoking by the log fire, his long legs over one arm of the chair, and his curly head at an appropriate angle, while Lucia, in a blue gown, mended his gloves with fierce little pats and pulls at the fingers.

"By George, it's a shame about that girl! She looks as if she didn't get enough to eat. She was with that woman who lodges with her; a weird old party, with a black wig, a purple bonnet with strings, a sense of humour and a cultivated accent; she might be worse."

"Willow has a perfect genius for lodgers who never pay her," interpolated his wife.

"I took them both to lunch. Bassenden was with me — the man we met at the Iversons'."

Lucia let the gloves drop, her face flushed, ecstatically.

"*Mr. Bassenden!*"

"Yes, he doesn't go back to Denver until his boy gets out of the hospital, next Friday. Well, we gave those two women a bang-up luncheon; I knew you'd want me to."

"Oh, why didn't you telephone for me to come in, when you knew Mr. Bassenden was there?" cried Lucia poignantly.

"How could I? It was one o'clock then. Use sense, Lucia. At any rate, he's coming to us for the Thursday Evening Club meeting next week."

"Not really! How perfectly grand!"

"I thought you'd be pleased. And by the way, Lucia, Willow gave me one of her cards with her new scheme on it: Orders taken for dinners, luncheons, suppers a specialty. I thought you might pay her to take the supper in charge — the baby takes up so much of your time now that he's teething."

"Well, of all things! Here this morning you were preaching economy to me, and now, because you think of this yourself ——" She appealed, with flushed cheeks, to the Universal Spirit of Womankind.

"*Aren't men funny!* They hate to spend twenty-five cents for a new gas bracket, but when it comes to big things! All right, if you'll pay."

"I'll pay. We've got to do something to help her. Willow will get the chance to be upstairs with us part of the time, won't she?"

"Certainly."

"Then *that's* settled. Speaking of Willow," Mr. Bannard reared his handsome head indignantly; "I heard about Hen Porch tonight, and I think it's a darned shame! If

that's all you women can do, to let her marry Hen Porch!"

"Stop banging the table. You shake the lamp! Donald Bannard, do you know how old Willow is?"

"No, and I don't want to. She's a lovely girl, that's what she is! If she hasn't married before this, it's because young men are so stuck on themselves they don't know a good thing when they see it, and that awful father of hers was enough to keep any one away. But she hits it off with a married man all right. That fellow who liked her first was married — that's what gave him sense. She's the kind a married man can talk to without any foolishness about it: she's sweet and she's restful and she keeps track of what you're telling her without any interruptions — and her eyes make you feel that you're a big strong man. Bassenden said he hadn't enjoyed meeting a woman so much in a long time. And then you talk of *Hen Porch!* What I can't see is, why you women haven't got together before now, and married her off once for all. You just selfishly enjoy your own perfectly good husbands, and don't do a thing for her."

"Donald Bannard ——"

"Oh, yes, I know all you are going to say. I'm vulgar, of course. But what is the use

of women howling for the vote and bragging of the way they'll rule for the good of every one, if they can't so much as marry off one sweet, unprotected woman in their midst? *I* could, if I got busy, I know that."

"Then why don't you?"

"Very well, I will. I'll ask old Hooker out. He hasn't been here in ages."

"Mr. Hooker ——"

"There you go! You've never forgiven him for being fat, and for eating up mushrooms when you didn't have enough. Well, if he *is* fond of his food, all the more reason why he should take to Willow. I'll tell him it's her show, and he'll be struck by her ability. You reach a man's heart through his stomach. At any rate, he's a gentleman — he's no Hen Porch. Mrs. Bannard, have the goodness to stop. I wish an end to this unseemly brawl. I want to read."

In the Bannard family there was never any real conversation — one or the other of them held the floor. Only Lucia, of course, had the last word. "I do think Mr. Porch is a *very* nice man," she said, before she gave herself up to the delightful anticipation of entertaining Mr. Bassenden.

Good food was the cult of the Thursday Evening Club; supper had much to do with

the popularity of the house where it was served. It was always rather difficult, for instance, to get the men to the Iversons', where the enormous silver trays offered one the most minute of pâtés, a mouthful of marblelike pink and green ice, sandwiches the size of postage stamps, and a thimbleful of coffee. On the other hand, there was also a feeling of tempered enjoyment toward the Crandalls, where the black walnut table with its blue doilies, worked by old Mrs. Crandall, was spread with platters of lukewarm rarebit and a salad that delusively aroused anticipation by simulating the festive lobster, when it was really only the same old apple and Spanish pepper, with a mayonnaise that left no impression on the mixture. The Brentwoods, of course, excelled every one else in their chicken and mushrooms, and hot biscuits; the Chandors and Paxtons ran a close second; Lucia herself always strove to have something original as well as good.

The prospect of having Mr. Hooker in Willow's behalf, combined with the honour of entertaining Mr. Bassenden, made her feel that no effort could be too great.

Mr. Bassenden had happened to stay over night the week before at the Iversons' when the Club had its last meeting; he had known Mr. Iverson some years ago in Denver, the latter, as a semi-invalid, having later

somewhat lost track of his friends. Those who had met the stranger, the women especially, looked back upon it as an Event.

He was a man of forty-five or so, remarkably handsome in a large, clean, masculine way; he had a broad forehead under his thick, waving, slightly grayish hair; his eyes were brilliantly blue; his nose was straight, his chin square, and very white teeth showed when he smiled delightfully. He had a certain gracefulness of power in every motion of his tall, rather solid, square-shouldered figure, when he leaned on the mantelpiece talking to Mr. Iverson, or brought a chair forward for Mrs. Bantry. He had a quiet, but charming manner that seemed to be the outcome of a noble nature. Magnetism radiated from him; wherever he stood, was easily the centre of the room.

That he was one of the finest men Mr. Iverson had ever known; that he was very wealthy; that he had told Mr. Iverson he had come East to visit a sick boy at school; that his wife — whom Mr. Iverson remembered as a very domineering woman, had died some years before; that he and his brother Arthur had lived alone in his magnificent house in Denver, but that he himself was to be married and bring a new mistress there, were all component parts of slight information

gleaned by eager questioners. Mr. Iverson, who was somewhat deaf, had at least understood that the fourth of the next month was the date of the wedding. To Mrs. Iverson, who had questioned Mr. Bassenden as to the bride-elect, the latter had simply replied:

"She is very beautiful."

It was impossible to pursue the subject of his personal affairs.

The men admired his physical perfections with the ardour which only men evince to one of their own sex, while they unanimously voted him a good fellow; to the women he held an even stronger appeal to sentiment in a glamour such as might surround royalty, or a great tenor. His lightest word, or fleeting glance, seemed instinct with a subtle insight, a high, heart-to-heart appreciation. Each woman felt it meant for her alone, with a yearning impression that she could say things to him that a lesser man wouldn't understand. . . . Mrs. Bantry told, with shining eyes, how wonderful he was in picking up her handkerchief three times.

"I can't tell you what there was about it that made it *different;* it just simply showed that he never forgot you, even when he seemed to be absorbed in talking to some one else!"

Later they had had an unfinished conversation on the presence of spirits.

Nineteen-year-old Audrey Brentwood had announced, in the brazen parlance of the day, that she was perfectly crazy over Mr. Bassenden. She didn't care what his age was; if he were not going to be married already, he could have her!

Mrs. Cranmore sent him over one of her celebrated fresh eggs for his breakfast. Elinor Chandor elaborately copied out a Scotch song that he said his mother had sung. Mrs. Wank sent him a repulsive, thin, gilded copy of her "Two Days in the Yellowstone," which nobody had ever been known to read. Lucia Bannard herself impulsively wrote him a little note, beginning:

"Just a line, dear Mr. Bassenden, to tell you how *wonderfully* I enjoyed your description last night of the Oberammergau play. I thought you would like to know that you made it seem something more to me than it had ever been before. If I ever see it myself, I shall think of you." But after all she didn't send it; a vision of Donald's raised eyebrows and pursed whistling lips made her feel foolish. As Elinor Chandor said, you didn't need to tell things to a man like that; he understood without it.

The only woman whom Mr. Bassenden hadn't spoken to that night was Willow Walters. Mrs. Iverson said he had noticed her once sitting over by the dark green portiére, which

showed off her drooping white-clad figure and her fairness, and had asked about her; Mrs. Iverson had given him a brief account of Willow's history, and he seemed interested, but he didn't seek her afterward, though it was disapprovingly noticed that Willow, looking up once and meeting his eyes, had flushed. It was felt to be a little forward of her to blush so intimately.

Lucia spent a morning in consultation with Miss Walters about the eventful Thursday, the latter bringing a selection of recipes and menus with her. Lucia saw her from the window as she came along accompanied by the candidate for matrimony, the excellent Mr. Porch, who as a contractor, didn't go to town with the men. His plain, heavy-chinned face was agleam, but by the side of his solid commonplaceness her air of delicate, fugitive aloofness seemed even more evident, as she hurried lightly along.

To Lucia's critical eye Willow looked unusually well as she entered; a faint colour in her cheek appeared to be called forth by a long-stemmed deep crimson rose, in the front of her shabby, tight-fitting black jacket, that set off her whole costume, but her beautiful blue eyes seemed to have a more childlike and helpless look than ever under their haze.

"Now, Mrs. Bannard," she announced in

her sweet, low voice, "before we decide on the bill of fare, I want it understood that I am to have all the responsibility of this supper, or I will not undertake it at all. That is what you pay me for, and pay well. I will not accept one penny unless I do the work."

"Very well," said Lucia meekly, but with a side glance at the speaker. Could Willow do it?

"Then how would you like frogs' legs *en casserole*, with nuts and whipped cream? That's quite new."

"N-no, I don't think men care much for nuts and whipped cream. As Mr. Bassenden will be here, and a friend from town, a Mr. Hooker, I'd like everything to be very nice."

"Yes, indeed. I have a receipt — a very interesting dish made of the breasts of partridges. You chop them first, and then ——"

"You may skip that."

The lines in Miss Walters' forehead began to show, the colour in her cheeks faded out.

"How would you like individual oyster pies? Not pâtés, but deep English pies, served very hot, with celery and pickle sandwiches?"

"That sounds good," approved Lucia, "*Very* good," she repeated, adding swiftly, "Why not have a nice chicken salad with that; they would combine well together, and be enough solid food, with the coffee."

"Very well. Then afterward you could have

a fruit ice-cream with candied cherries and chestnuts in it, served with a clear orange jelly cut into strips, little frosted pound cakes and macaroons."

"That really is charming," cried Lucia. "But you can't see to all this yourself; of course, you'll have Ellen in the kitchen, but she's so inefficient; I do wish you'd let me help you."

"Thank you, but I have all the directions here," said Miss Walters in her even tone, touching the papers in her hand. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll be going now. I'll make out my list of materials and quantities later."

"If you haven't enough money ——"

"Oh, I'm sure I have enough."

"I wish you'd come to see me oftener," said Lucia impulsively.

"I have so little time ——"

"Yes, I know; but oh, haven't things been terribly hard for you sometimes? I've been so *sorry!* Wouldn't it perhaps be best now if — Please don't mind if I ask ——" Lucia stopped; Willow was gazing past her with something oddly bright in her smile. The sweet voice in which she spoke seemed to come from afar.

"No, it hasn't been so hard. I don't know whether I can make you understand; sometimes I don't understand myself, but I haven't minded my life at all — truly I haven't! Ever since

something happened to me — that's nine years ago — it's just as if the real *I* had been put to sleep, drugged, I have just gone on and on, and on; it hasn't made any difference, I haven't minded until now. But these last few days" — her lips suddenly trembled — "they've changed it all; I'm getting terribly afraid I'll wake up! That — that would be bad. I don't know why I'm saying this to you — but you're so sweet to me! When I come in a house like this — there's something different in a house where people love each other; perhaps you don't notice it, but I do." She put both hands in Lucia's and the two stood silent for a moment.

"You have the prettiest place behind your ear," said Lucia irrelevantly.

Miss Walters suddenly flushed scarlet, as at some revealing remembrance. She put up one hand to her neck involuntarily as if to hide it from sight.

"I really must leave! Give yourself no uneasiness about the supper; it will be all right," she said in her usual tone, and was gone.

"But I don't know whether it *will* be all right or not!" Lucia said that evening to her husband, after she had got as far as this in her narrative. "Is Mr. Hooker coming?"

"Yes; he remembered Willow."

"Have you seen Mr. Bassenden?"

"Not to speak to. I saw him yesterday, though, in Fraunces Tavern, lunching with Willow."

"*What?*"

"True as you're born." Mr. Bannard set his lips in a straight line as he met his wife's eyes. "He's a handsome brute, and no mistake! They seemed to be having a very good time together. He took her into the florist's afterward and bought her crimson roses. I happened to look through the window as I passed."

"She had one on to-day," said Lucia breathlessly. "Donald Bannard! And you never told me a word last night!"

"Why should I?"

"Why *should* you! Anything as extraordinary as that ——"

"Not extraordinary at all. He's an awfully nice fellow, and she's a very lovely woman."

"What? When she hardly knows him, and he's to be married next week? Stop hunching yourself together; I hate you when you make yourself look idiotic. Do you mean to say that if you were away in another city a week before *we* were married, you would have taken a girl out to lunch alone — I don't care *how* old Willow is, she looked young enough to-day! — and given her crimson roses?"

"I'd have given her sweet peas. I don't care

for red roses," said Mr. Bannard coolly, and then sat up straight. "Lucia! Can't you ever take a joke?"

The prospect of having Mr. Bassenden at Lucia's Thursday evening — he was to leave the next day for the scene of his marriage — gave it immense prestige. The men were careful that the business exigencies of the last of the month shouldn't keep them away, and every woman felt that she had something, particularly, to say to him in connection with their last meeting. Elinor Chandor had formulated a long conversation on music, beginning with: "I noticed that you were fond of Scotch songs, Mr. Bassenden." Gentle, quiet Mrs. Iverson had an anecdote of her son's college days that she knew it would please him to hear; even Lucia Bannard found herself murmuring in imagination: "When you were speaking to me of Oberammergau, Mr. Bassenden, I forgot to say . . ."

His coming had been a rival to the subject of Willow, about whom everybody was in despair. It was whispered that not only was she not smiling on Mr. Porch, but that she had been seen around with Mr. Bassenden. Every one felt somehow responsible for her indelicately hanging on his kindness in this way. "For he can't *like* it," Mrs. Bantry

feelingly argued. "I think somebody ought to tell her not to. For all her quietness there's always been something in Willow that you couldn't explain."

All day the kitchen of the house of entertainment had been in a turmoil. Lucia, hearing her husband come in late — he had dined in town with Mr. Bassenden — rushed down to meet him with her tale of woe.

"I thought you said she began so nicely yesterday," he objected, hat in hand.

"I did — but it's *all* beginning! The poor thing doesn't get anywhere; she doesn't know how. She's rolling her pie crust still with that composed air, while her fingers are trembling and there's a red spot in each cheek. She won't get any chance to play cards this evening! and she's only made half enough of the chicken salad, and we've had to get the cake from the baker's! Ellen helped her all she could, but the baby has kept me so tied down all day I couldn't do a thing. Of course it puts me in a *dreadful* position! No, don't take off your overcoat. I want you to go for two bottles of milk. Willow forgot to order it."

"Milk!"

"Yes, you can get it at Lester's, around the corner from Main Street; the little grocery that is always open."

"All right. Perhaps you didn't notice Bassenden's here."

"Good evening, Mrs. Bannard," said Mr. Bassenden coming forward. He looked handsomer and more wonderful than ever in his fur overcoat, standing there tall and imposing, his thick, dark hair over his white forehead, and his brilliant dark eyes smiling down at her. "Let me go for the milk. I have the car here. Mr. Bannard, I know, has to dress."

"Oh, Mr. Bassenden!" breathed Lucia, all aglow. It was almost as if he might have been a relation.

"But before I go I'll ask you to take these." He went down the hall and brought back a couple of boxes. "Just a few roses for you, and violets for Miss Walters. She's helping you to-night, I understand. At the corner of Main Street, you said? I'll be back in a few minutes."

Violets for Willow! In the midst of her own pleasure Lucia hadn't time to analyze the shock the words gave her, or do more than take note, for future reference, of Willow's downcast eyes. Before she knew they were upon her, the guests had arrived — Mr. Hooker, a small, fattish gentleman with glistening shirt front and a black eyeglass ribbon, being all too evidently brought by the lure of food; complimentary reminiscences of the lob-

ster once eaten under that roof forming part of his first greeting to Lucia.

Everybody came at once. Even Mr. Iverson, who seldom left his own home in the evening, escorted his wife. The sight of Mr. Bassenden's fur coat on the rack in the hall seemed a delightful earnest of pleasure. There was an unusual rustling and preening in the dressing-room, where the cloaks and wraps were piled on the pink and lacy spare bed, before going down to meet the distinguished guest; Mrs. Bantry waiting with officious patience and a bitter smile for a chance to see her stout, newly corseted figure in the mirror before which all the women were dabbing on powder and instantly wiping it off again. The tide of excitement was running high.

Yet from the first moment when, hastening downstairs, they caught sight of Mr. Bassenden talking to a group of men in the hall below, there was felt to be a vague, indefinable, but disappointing lack in him, though he was as royal looking and dominant as ever. He came forward with instant politeness, to be sure, but there was no warmth, no individuality in his greeting; it was, as Elinor Chandor said, as if he were meeting you for the first time; and he returned at once to the group of men, who were talking of the Senate, or the Market, or Political Corruption, with the tiresome oblivious-

ness which men show when they get on those subjects. Only whenever Lucia came into view, with a distracted face, he always saw her at once; starting up to go to her, and occasionally following her out of the room; they consulted together with that intimacy which is so satisfying to the participants and which leaves everybody else on the outside. Mrs. Bantry, indeed, was so fortunate as to find herself later alone by him for a moment, but when she said, with tremulous sprightliness, referring to their former conversation:

"This is indeed no night for spirits to be abroad," he had only replied, "I beg your pardon?" as if recalling his wandering thoughts, and added, "Yes, I think the fog has lifted."

Afterward, instead of taking his allotted place at the card table with Mrs. Bantry and Elinor Chandor, he dropped into a chair by Mr. Iverson — to whom he had been heard talking, apparently, about his wedding next week — at a table over near the door, with old Mrs. Crandall in her black banded hair and black chenille shawl — who wasn't meant to come — and pretty, quiet Mrs. Paxton, the only woman in the Club who had evinced no interest in him at all. He laughingly declined to change his position when the mistake was pointed out to him. It was very disappointing!

A singular atmosphere seemed to settle

down. With all the soft lights in the yellow and mahogany-furnished room, the flowers, the pretty dresses, the air of general festivity, there was a pervading sense of stress behind the scenes. There were rumours that Willow was doing very badly.

It became one of those blank evenings of entertainment whose parts have no cohesion; one might as well be out on a snowbank for all the social warmth evolved.

Lucia kept going out and coming back with a still more distracted expression. Once there was a horrid smell of burning milk. She called her husband to her, and he disappeared, shrugging his shoulders as he returned.

"Looks as if we wouldn't get much to eat to-night," he suggested. "The oysters seem to have burned up, and the ice-cream is full of salt. I bid one on hearts."

Mr. Hooker had a bitter smile, as one lured out under false pretences.

"If Lucia had asked my advice," said old Mrs. Crandall to the guest of the evening, while the cards were being shuffled, "she would never have placed any dependence on Willow Walters. She is a very sweet woman, but she is incompetent in every way; my daughter-in-law finds it impossible to help her. The best thing for her to do is to marry Mr. Henry Porch. His mother keeps the house."

"Ah, too bad, too bad," said Mr. Iverson. "I understand Willow's cottage is to be torn down next week, to make room for the street." He added, in explanation to Mr. Bassenden. "Hard time she has to get along, poor girl; she needs some one to look after her. Hah! Something dropped in the kitchen! It sounded like Hendrik Hudson's bowling ground."

"I play before you put your hand down, Mr. Bassenden," stated Mrs. Paxton remindingly.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Bassenden. He waited with a visible effort while the lady studied her resources, and then, laying his cards on the table for dummy with one comprehensive swoop, dashed out to Lucia Bannard in the hall, and disappeared with her in the regions beyond.

A few minutes later he was seen emerging into the dining-room, carrying a large dish of apples and oranges in his steady hands, with Willow Walters' slender white-aproned figure beside him. Her ordinarily pale cheeks were pink, her eyes, as she raised them, had their pathetically helpless look. The impetus of their conversation still carried them; he was leaning toward her and she toward him — there was something in the manner of both that indefinably startled, before the two vanished once more. A few minutes later a chug-chug was heard by the card-players, and the lights of a

motor flashed past a window that had been slightly raised for the air.

"Where's Mr. Bassenden? Isn't he coming back?" asked Mrs. Paxton.

"Why, he asked if we'd excuse him for a half-hour," said Mr. Bannard with what seemed to be a mixture of embarrassment and jauntiness. "He — he's gone out in the car for a few minutes. The fact is — he's taking Willow — Miss Walters — out for a spin; the heat in the kitchen has been a little too much for her."

Old Mrs. Crandall sniffed. "Why, that's very kind of him," ejaculated Mrs. Bantry wonderingly. "Very." She fell to playing cards with an air of detachment from her surroundings that became noticeable also in the manner of the other women. Mr. Bassenden, the star of the occasion, had been unwarrantably removed from them by Willow! And on this last night of his stay! That mysteriousness that had always been felt in her seemed to have come suddenly to the fore.

And they were gone for a long time. . . .

"I suppose she appealed to his sympathies, and he couldn't refuse," murmured Nell Crandall to Mrs. Bantry, as the game at last wore to a close. The men and women separated into two sections while they waited for supper, if there were indeed to be any.

"I think it extremely tactless of her," said Mrs. Bantry.

Old Mrs. Crandall sniffed again. "I have always observed something in Willow — I can't exactly explain what it is, that ——"

"Ladies and gentlemen and fellow-citizens," proclaimed Mr. Bannard, entering suddenly, "I have the honour to inform you that our own supper being unfortunately not eatable, our distinguished guest, Mr. Bassenden, has returned to say that he has been making arrangements to have one imported from town, and that it will be here in half an hour. He wants this to be his party, as he is leaving to-morrow. In the meantime, would you like to take a look at the moon? It's grand! Throw something around you all and come out!"

Laughing and talking, even the morose Mr. Hooker, inspired by this unexpected lift to the occasion, the party trooped outside on the hard ground that lay frozen in an atmosphere so windless that the air seemed benignantly soft and mild. The beauty of the moonlit scene, incomparably bright, stole into the senses, so that after a moment voices were hushed; they all stood silent, looking at it. All of a sudden some one, turning toward the house, uttered a shocked exclamation. Everybody turned to look that way.

The shade had been drawn up from the kitchen

window. Within, Mr. Bassenden stood with Willow, the light fell on both faces. His handsome head was bending over her, his face all tenderness, as he stood a little apart from her; he held her two hands in his, drawing her to him. But Willow! Was this the pale, colourless girl they had all known, this slender, spiritlike, exquisitely beautiful creature, with the violets at her bosom, her eyes starry, her lips parted, her cheeks rosed with an immortal flame? There was a moment . . . . . with one impulse everybody turned away and tiptoed into the house, only Mr. Iverson breaking the silence to say musingly:

"Odd, the mistake I made about Bassenden's marriage. I am a little hard of hearing. He was explaining to me to-night that it is his brother Arthur who is to be married next week!"

"Well, she certainly landed on both feet," said Donald Bannard the following spring. He and Lucia had been at the opera the night before, occupying a box as the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Bassenden, just on a visit from Denver. "Did you twig the rope of pearls, and the white satin and the opera cloak? She's a beauty, and he can't keep his eyes off her. It's a wonderful match; and to think I made it, after all you women had given up!"

"*You!*" scoffed his wife, indignantly.

Thursday

Thursday

"NO, MRS. BRADY, I'm afraid you can't clean Mr. Laurence's room this next Thursday; the Thursday after that he goes off on his fishing trip, and we'll get at it then."

"It's t'ree weeks to-day, ma'am, since it was done t'orough."

"Yes, I know." Mrs. Laurence, hatted and cloaked as she was on her return from town, was still in all the glow of wonderment at an extraordinary happening there occasioned by the merest chance; she had been thinking of it all the way out in the train, and it seemed a little difficult to adjust herself to those needs of the household which always rose up and smote her the moment she entered it. On her way upstairs she had already telephoned for extra milk, changed perforce the order for dinner, and sent her eleven-year-old son Robert on that belated errand to the post-office to which he had daily to have insistent reminder. She stood now irresolutely in the doorway of her husband's den, so-called, strewn from end to

end with fishing paraphernalia; her eyes wandering over the groups of linen-cased rods stacked in the corners or on the lounge — he was always adding an absolutely necessary one to that overflowing, unusable stock — the blanketlike coat hanging over the back of a chair, the seven-league waterproof boots sprawling their astounding length over by the window, the immense green-japanned bait-pail in the centre of the floor, and the table, on which, in the midst of a toppling pile of magazines, a large and gorgeous leather tackle-box was surrounded by a bulging mass of reels, fly-books, green and red floats, matches and cigar stands, all covered with a light layer of dust on the edges; it was as much as even Mrs. Laurence's life was worth to displace any article on that table.

But she repeated firmly: "We'll get at it the Thursday following; I've just invited company for this Thursday, anyway," and turned away with a sigh after paying the worker, going into her own room to change before her husband's homecoming; that unkempt den was the visible manifestation of a problem that seemed to have come to stay. For twelve years she and her husband had shared all their pleasures; they stayed home or went out in the evenings together, and by an unworded compact neither had ever left the other for a vacation. He had never wanted to do anything away from

her; it was she who suggested their pleasures; she had felt herself the Dispenser of all Delights. It had become a pleasantly scoffing, half-envious habit of other women to say to her:

"Oh, you and your husband are so devoted!" And now just this last year, without any warning he had, in connection with a Mr. Wynkoop, a business friend unknown to her, developed a passion for fishing that threatened to push her entirely out of his horizon. He had not only gone off five times altogether without her last summer, but for the last four months he had done nothing but talk about his three days' trip in May to a secret trout-stream in another state. Mrs. Laurence, true to her cult, had spent their evenings at home up in the den, while he fingered his beloved fishing gear with shining eyes; but even with her utmost efforts at sympathetic attention her mind was apt to wander dreadfully, so that her would-be intelligent comments were strikingly the reverse, requiring incredibly patient further explanations from her husband — he never balked at explaining. She could never remember which kind of rod was used for which kind of fish. The only time that he had ever really shown annoyance was when she persisted in speaking to guests of his sacred four-pound trout, stretched out on a board upstairs, as "That bass Will was so crazy about catching;"

he seemed to really brood over that, in a way that wasn't like himself.

Lately he hadn't even needed her society, importing into the den no less a person than the village carpenter, a long, lanky, soft-stepped man of immense experience in fishing, to whose words Will listened as they dropped from his lips as if they were pearls, while she practised lonesomely on the piano downstairs. The fishing had also made trouble in her well-ordered household last summer, by his bringing home live bait and insisting on its being preserved in the laundry wash-tubs without reference to the exigencies of the family wash; even without that grievance the faithful Ellen had complained that "all thim little weeny fishes slippin' round that ghostly when she went into the cellar at night, took all the stomach from her." Mrs. Laurence felt that she could hardly wait until this phase was over, and everything be as it always had been before, forgetting that Time never goes backward, any more than water runs uphill.

"May I come up?"

The voice was that of a neighbour, Mrs. Stone. Mrs. Stone had a way of following her voice at once, without waiting for an answer, that was sometimes disconcerting. Mrs. Laurence gave a wild look around the room as she

hastily snatched up an enshrouding kimono that tangled for the moment and wouldn't go on without a struggle, as the figure of the visitor appeared on the threshold. Mrs. Stone was a large woman of matronly build, dressed in a very much starched and shrunken last year's white duck skirt, and a shirt-waist, partially covered by a gray ulster buttoned at the neck with empty sleeves hanging limply down at the sides. She sat down on the nearest chair, saying as she did so, with a comprehensive glance around the room:

"You don't mind *me*, I hope. Goodness, you don't mean to say you've taken off your high-necked flannels *already!*"

"I never wear them," said Mrs. Laurence hastily.

"Oh! How the dust does show on everything, doesn't it at this time of year? I've been cleaning all day. That rug by your dressing-table hasn't worn very well, has it?"

Mrs. Stone paused momentarily, and then went on, this time as one with a purpose:

"I saw you coming back from town, and I thought I'd run over, just for a moment. Mrs. Budd and I have been at the Spicers'. Poor little Mrs. Spicer is all worked up — you know how nervous she is! It's about your Robert. Mrs. Laurence, *is* his father going to let him have a gun for his birthday?"

"Why, certainly not," said Mrs. Laurence, with decision.

Mrs. Stone's tragic countenance only slightly relaxed.

"Well, Robert has been telling all over the neighbourhood — goodness, you used to have such an enormous braid! Hair comes out so in the spring, doesn't it? *I* won't have a spear left soon! Well, Robert is telling all over the neighbourhood that he's to have a gun for his birthday; he points sticks now at all the children and pretends to pull a trigger, and you can see yourself, Mrs. Laurence, what *that* will lead to! Poor little Gladys Spicer nearly had a fit the other day because he told her that she was dead, and Gladys Spicer's nurse heard him say that next week he was going to shoot the grocer's white horse. Mrs. Laurence, that boy ought *not* to be allowed to have a gun."

"He isn't going to have one." Mrs. Laurence's colour rose with her voice, as she strove to hook the back of her gown with trembling fingers. "If Robert said anything of the kind, he was just imagining — playing, as a child will. But, of course, if you take everything seriously that you hear from that Gladys Spicer and her nurse! Whatever Robert's other faults may be he is a *perfectly* truthful child!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Stone, with eyes that seemed to take on a blank, veiled expression;

as the mother of four she was perhaps less given to a wholesale belief in virtue. She politely swerved from the subject as one who sees danger below it. "Was it pleasant in town to-day?"

"Yes, very," answered Mrs. Laurence, sitting down at last in the long draperies of her rose-coloured gown to buckle the beaded slippers on her pretty feet, with a remorseful effort to recover her hospitable spirit. She had that kind of lofty, sweet purpose with which one may inform one's life, no matter how small that life's environment; was not one of Raphael's most famous Holy Families painted within the limits of a barrel hoop? She was always, through all her deeply trivial excitements, seeking her rightful connection with high things. "I saw such a lovely hat for your Susan in one of the shops! I'll help you make one later, if you like. And the most unexpected thing happened to me! There, right on the corner by the Flatiron Building, I met some people from California that I hadn't seen for six years — friends of Mr. Laurence's — the Von Rosens."

"Oh, that German family he lived with before he was married?"

"Yes, the same people. I've only met them that time before, but of course I've heard of them so much from William. It was impossible to mistake them; the only change

I could see was that Mrs. Von Rosen looked even fatter and rosier, and the two daughters, Amelia and Ida—they pronounce it *E*-da—are thinner and yellower. They are such warm-hearted people — I was almost embarrassed, right there in the street. Shall we go downstairs now? They are going on to Philadelphia this evening, but they promised to stop off here to dinner on their way back to town on Thursday; they leave for California the next day. I knew Will would be *so* disappointed if he didn't see them."

Mrs. Stone stared inexplicably. "Why, I thought Mr. Laurence told my husband he was going fishing on Thursday?"

"He is going in May."

"But *this* is May!"

"Yes, of course it is — I'm so absent-minded! But it's next week that he goes fishing."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Stone. She hastened to offer her neighbourly services. "If you'd like my recipe for lobster bisque you can have it as well as not."

It was an understood thing on the Ridge that Company from Town had its own laws, the neighbourhood delicately effacing itself in these occasions without hint of offence, sharing indeed opulently in the calculations beforehand, and the conversation about it afterward, although not bidden to the feast.

The sight of the curly-haired and rosy-cheeked Robert, in his brown corduroy knickerbockers, cap in hand, at the foot of the stairs, incited to further beneficence. "And why don't you let Robert come over to our house to dinner that night? It will be one out of the way."

"Well, thank you, I'll see," said Mrs. Laurence, tentative response in her voice, before turning to her only child.

"Did you go to the post-office, Robert, as I told you?"

"Yes."

"I saw him there, as I came along," corroborated Mrs. Stone nicely.

"And did I get any letters?"

Robert's dark eyes were fixed on her earnestly.

"Did I get any *letters*, Robert?"

"No. No, mother. May I go to Herbert's now?"

"Wash your face and hands before you go." Mrs. Laurence said the last words automatically before turning once more to the guest. "Really, I think some one ought to complain at Washington of the postal service. Just because we have nothing but a little branch post-office here on the Ridge, half the time we don't get our letters. My sister sent me two last month that I never received at all."

"Yes, it's dreadful," agreed Mrs. Stone. It was the thing to complain of the postal service in the small outlying residential section that made the Ridge. "Mrs. Spicer got a letter back from the Dead Letter Office only this last week. To be sure, it was misdirected, but the principle's the same. Goodness, here's Mr. Laurence. I didn't expect to be here when he came home!" She hastily gathered her ulster about her. "I see you've brought home a new landing net. How does your wife like your going off fishing so much?"

"Oh, she's as interested in it as I am," returned Mr. Laurence, mistakenly, taking off his hat to the departing guest, before stooping over to kiss his wife. He was a tall, dark man of whose distinguished appearance she was proud.

II

It was not until the evening meal was comfortably under way that Mrs. Laurence artistically brought forward the subject of engrossing interest.

"Whom do you think I met in town to-day? You'd never guess."

"Then you'd better tell me."

"Well, it was the Von Rosens — actually, the whole three of them! What do you say to that?"

"Ida must be getting on by this time," said Mr. Laurence with unconscious tact.

His wife had always suspected Ida of a weakness for Will in those days when she herself had been a stranger to him.

"Oh, well, I think she looks about the same," said his wife generously. "They overwhelmed me with questions about you. I knew you'd be heartbroken if you didn't see them. They go to Philadelphia this afternoon!"—she explained their plans at length, as she had to Mrs. Stone —"so they will stop off at the station below, on the main road and come out here to dinner."

"That will be nice," said her husband. "What night did you say?"

"Thursday."

"*Wh-a-a-t?*"

Mr. Laurence dropped his knife and fork with a clatter on his plate, and looked with horrified incredulousness at his wife. "Do you mean to say you've asked them for *this* Thursday?"

Mrs. Laurence's colour rose. "Don't be so — *forcible*, Will. Why shouldn't I ask them for Thursday?"

"Because that's the day I want to go fishing. Great Scott, Nan, I've been planning this trip ever since Thanksgiving, and you go and ask people out to dinner. I can't *understand* it. Why you should have pitched on that night of all others when you *knew* —— !"

Tears of vexation came into Mrs. Laurence's eyes.

"I don't see why you speak like that. You've been talking so long about this old trip that it's no wonder I got mixed up; I thought it was the next Thursday, of course."

She paused an instant to gather her forces. "Can't you be here to dinner that night, and go on to join the others the next day?"

"Go on the next day!" Mr. Laurence laughed shortly. "Do you realize, Anna, that even starting at seven o'clock Thursday *evening* we don't get to the lodge on the Susquehanna until the middle of the next morning? We have to stay all night in a little tavern beyond Coalberg. We had to write last week to have a rig meet us. We'll only have two days' fishing as it is; you know very well that I have to get home Sunday night."

The mere recounting of the plan served to bring back the accustomed tone to his voice. "You'll have to just send word to the Von Rosens to come some other time."

"But *William!*" Mrs. Laurence looked outraged now in her turn. "I can't do that, possibly; I told you just now that they'd gone to Philadelphia — *I* don't know where they're stopping!"

"Well!" Mr. Laurence shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all your own doing. I certainly have given you warning enough. You'll have to make my excuses, and entertain them yourself, that's all."

"You don't mean to say that you will go away when the *Von Rosens* are coming?" Mrs. Laurence regarded her husband with unfeigned horror. "Why, they're taking all this trouble to see *you* — they don't care for me! The time I met them we hadn't a thing in common; they bored me to extinction. They're *your* friends." She gave a gulp that might have been a sob. No one knew how heartfully noble it had been of her to behave so nicely to them. "And I must say, Will, that if you can forget all they did for you — you have so often told me that Mrs. Von Rosen really saved your life when you were ill out there, bringing you broth in the middle of the night, [even ——" her voice trembled with the pathos of the situation. "And Amelia reading to you day after day when your eyes gave out — if you can't even give up such a little thing as this fishing trip for them now ——"

Such a little thing as the fishing trip!

The two sat there on opposite sides of the table, lightened by its yellow daffodils. Before Mr. Laurence's vision came the irresponsible, free, jolly companionship of the train journey, when one began insensibly to leave all burdens

behind; the smell of the wood smoke in the hospitable, far tavern of the night; the mighty breakfast eaten at dawn; the drive through the pine-scented woods to a certain joy; he saw the tall, lush grass on either side of the narrow brown stream, with bare and nodding boughs interlaced slenderly above, through the delicious tracery of which arched a delicately blue, white-clouded sky. He felt the brain-soothing peace that came with the sounding swirl and rush of that white-foamed, cascading brook; the exhilaration of that needed rest; that indescribable moment when the leaping trout sent a quiver down the length of the rod, creating a man over again in an Eden that was even more perfect than the first Eden because he didn't need any Eve. It was all so vivid to Will Laurence that he couldn't believe that his wife didn't see it, too. The very vision calmed.

"If you can't send them word not to come — I suppose you can't, though I confess I don't understand how you came to get yourself in such a box, Nan — have a good dinner, anyway; Mother Von Rosen knows one when she sees it."

"Of course I'll have a good dinner; you needn't tell me that," said his wife, with a feeling of immense relief. She had known that he would have to give up the trip when he stopped to think. With unusual tact for a woman who has gained her point she forbore to press

it further home. But as they left the table she asked:

"Why don't you ever take me fishing with you? I met a woman the other day who said that she always went with her husband."

"Oh, you wouldn't like it," said her husband with his hand on her arm. "It wouldn't do for you at all."

"Why not?"

He gave the arm a tender pressure.

"Too snaky."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Laurence with an instinctive shudder, and a horrible sense of dreadful slithering things slipping around her William's legs. She was glad that she would escape the thought of it this week, at any rate.

They had an engagement in town the next evening, which was Saturday, and company all day Sunday. When the company had departed Robert had still to be read to exhaustively before going to bed, a Sunday night office that had lately torn Mrs. Laurence asunder in the performance, her husband going over to consult Mr. Stone who had once fished in some prehistoric period, and not coming back until she was ready for bed herself. To-night, Robert, angelic-eyed and flushed on his white pillow, kept her by his bedside at least half an hour longer, consulting her on matters of the soul, such as if it was always right if you told

the Exact Truth; which only, after all, led up to an ungranted request not to be sent to the post-office any more in the afternoons, for the absurd reason that he didn't like to go in the doorway; she was obliged to define at length what a Duty was.

But to-night Will didn't go out; he was still in his own room when she reached it.

"Come in," he said hospitably, clearing a place for her on the lounge, as she trailed, in her pretty blue gown — Mrs. Laurence liked pretty clothes — through the disorder. "I'm just trying to think what I'll take." He indicated an immense pile on the floor beside an open suitcase. "Shoes take up the most room, of course, and those boots. Last year I stuffed some things in the bait-pail, but I'm not going to take the bait-pail. One thing I'm going to decide right now ——" he spoke with sudden forcefulness, stalked forward and abstracted a pair of trousers from the pile, and sent them flying across the room. "I've always taken two pairs and I've never needed more than one. I've settled that question now and forever. What's the matter, Nan?"

Mrs. Laurence sat gazing up at him with startled eyes. "What are you making all these arrangements *now* for?"

"For Thursday, of course."

"But you're not *going!*"

"Not going? What do you mean? Of course I'm going!"

"But I understood ——" Mrs. Laurence felt her lips trembling beyond her control. "You told me you would stay home on account of the Von Rosens."

"You bet your life I didn't," said Mr. Laurence, emphatically, roused to an unusual effort of slang. "Why, you're losing your mind, Nan; I say a thing like that? I never considered it for a moment!"

"You told me to have a good dinner."

"Of course I did — that's all right. I'm fond of old Mother Von Rosen. It's too bad; I'd like to see her, of course, if it were *any* other time; but as for saying I'd stay home, after all the arrangements I've made with Wynkoop — no, not for the Queen of Sheba!"

"Will!" said Mrs. Laurence. Her voice rose tragically. "Then all I can say is, that if your love for sport makes you so ungrateful, if it blots out everything but the little, narrow, inch-wide way of your own pleasure, so that you can't even give it up to see friends whom you profess to *love*, to whom you own yourself deeply indebted, and whom you may never see again in this world — if it makes you not even care for what is right — then I think fishing is a wicked thing!"

"All right, then it is," said her husband,

with cold gaiety. "I'm a thief and a murderer. Will you just move your foot for a moment? There's a reel down on the floor there. It's a new one." His voice insensibly softened; he smiled down at her. "Would you like to see how it works?"

"Thank you, no," said Mrs. Laurence politely. She went downstairs and played Handel's Largo on the piano, under the rose-coloured lamp, amidst the pretty artistic furnishings of the room, with great care and deep expression, that she might feel how calm she was. But if he hadn't given up, she hadn't, either. It seemed to be the deadlock that she had felt imminent for so long. She knew, as every loved wife knows, that she could win if she descended to certain measures; if she cried all the time, for instance, so that she threatened to make herself ill — but to that she couldn't descend. She could not win by an appeal to the senses; she couldn't wheedle, she couldn't coax — as some women might and whose profitable lightness she almost envied. When it came to a question of right there was a certain sweet and truthful earnestness in her, that connection with something high, which wouldn't let the appeal to it rest on anything lower. She had a standard, and he loved her for it. She tried to see *his* point of view — almost saw it, before it slipped predestinedly

away. Then she couldn't stay downstairs any longer, she must go up where he was; perhaps he had been thinking over what she had said.

As she reëntered the room, he looked up from the tackle-box to say:

"Cheer up, Nan, it'll be all right; they won't come."

"Why do you think that?" She had a momentary gleam of hope.

"Oh, just on general principles," he answered carelessly. There were some things which even after their closest communion of soul he had never told his wife; had never even thought of telling her.

He had lent poor old Mother Von Rosen a rather large sum of money years ago, which she had never been able to repay; on that last visit, six years ago, she had agonized over it when alone with him, though he had told her he didn't care if it was never paid. She mightn't look on this visit as lightsomely as Nan supposed.

"It's all very well to talk that way, but they are coming; they would have sent word at once if they hadn't been." Her voice was very gentle, but clear, as if she were speaking to Robert. "Will, if you knew what it means to me to have you go on this fishing trip now — it isn't your going, it's what it means. Dear, I've stopped being provoked and silly,

it's just your own good I'm thinking of — it's the way I've seen other men deteriorate, the way I thought you never could. I'd be a poor kind of a wife if I couldn't help you to keep to your highest self — if I shrank from telling you what was the truth."

"See here, Nan. Do you actually mean to say that *you want me to stay home?*" asked Mr. Laurence. His voice was amazed, incredulous, as if he heard her stupendous words for the first time. "For, of course, you know if you say the word, I won't go." His outraged eyes fixed hers, his lips pressed together, the lower one protruding slightly over the other; his unbending figure remained as much a thing apart from her as if her arms were not around him. Twelve years of intimate married life hadn't done away with a certain subtle strangeness in it; his wife had at times an unexplained awe of him as a man — perhaps he had it also in his turn at times toward some phases of her womanhood.

The moment for which she had hoped and striven had actually come like a stroke of lightning from heaven, but she could no more take advantage of that moment now than she could have raised herself through the ceiling — it was an effort out of nature. She temporized instead with angry weakness.

"Why should you throw all the responsibility

on me? You know perfectly well yourself what you ought to do."

"All right then, we'll let — the — subject — *drop*," said Mr. Laurence.

"And you're going?"

III

Those ensuing three days were the dreariest of her life; not even when Robert had the diphtheria had she been so mentally distraught. There was no relief for the sickness of her soul. She couldn't forgive Will for going, and if he had stayed he couldn't have forgiven her. Anyway, she would have had to lose. That was what it was to be a woman — you always, always had to give up! A man gave you what he wanted you to have, but if there was something *you* wanted and he didn't understand the need, you had to go without. And if Will even now had only shown her the little loving attentions that he had often shown her before — brought her flowers or sweets — but he only brought home more fishing-tackle. He wasn't doing anything to make up to her for this, precisely because he would never realize that there was anything to make up to her for. He was *obsessed* by this mania for fishing! She could call it nothing else. He was as amiable, as courteous, as affectionate as

ever, but as one listening to the Higher Call beyond, and all aglow with it. All he wanted to do was to go fishing!

She waited until the day beforehand to make out languidly her menu for the loathed dinner; her mind's eye pictured her surrounded by kind, tiresome Von Rosens, supporting their astonished, hurt disappointment; lamely lying out of the affair, telling them how much Will wanted to stay home and see them, but being bound by his word — etc., etc. The mere thought of that dinner alone with them made her feel frantic. She morbidly dreaded meeting Mrs. Stone when she went to market, to be revealed to the pitying neighbourhood afterward in her character as a repudiated wife.

Beside the larger stress was the minor one of a daily tussle with her son about changing those brown corduroy knickerbockers in which he seemed to want to live; he always forgot in the morning to put on the blue ones hung over night by the side of his bed. She was already, in Robert, experiencing the difficulty of making anything masculine do what he didn't want to do; Wednesday, she had sent him upstairs from the lunch table to change, and then come back and show her he had changed. And late in the afternoon, going into his room, she spied the discarded garments on the closet floor; as she picked them up a

stream of white envelopes slid from the pockets before her horrified eyes — wedding invitations, bills, a letter from her sister, three from friends, four small invitations, a letter in a German handwriting — Mrs. Laurence's fingers eagerly tore it open.

It had been written, of course, the very day that she had met the Von Rosens; they had decided to go home without coming back to New York at all.

They were not coming — they had never been coming! The whole pulling contention of this bitter week might have been avoided; that was her first fierce thought; but it was too late to alter the situation now — the moral aspect remained unchanged. Yet in that unreasonable way in which the material affects the spiritual, she felt a little more lenient toward her husband because she was not to suffer this last unbearable thorn-pricking, though it was by no doing of his. When she told Will that night he acquiesced brightly.

"Is that so? I never supposed they'd really come."

"I don't see how you could possibly suppose that." She felt herself drearily in the aggressive again, at once. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going up to settle things with Robert."

"Will — Will!" her agonized voice halted him. "*I've* been talking to him. He didn't

tell me a lie — truly! I have such an absurd way of speaking. It appears that I always said: 'Did I get any letters to-day?' Of course I *didn't* get them. If I had asked him, 'Have you any letters for me?' he would have handed them over at once. It was a sort of a game with the child; one understands so little what is in a child's mind! I blame myself for persisting in sending him to the post-office when he particularly asked me not to. *Will!*"

"He'll get your letters all right while I'm gone," said Mr. Laurence on his return from the upper regions. "The little rascal!" His tone had a satisfied affection in it. "*No;* you're not to go up."

His wife hid her face in his shoulder; she felt that she desperately needed a little comfort. After a few moments she murmured in a voice which she tried hard to steady:

"Do you suppose we can read a little together this evening — as long as you are going away to-morrow?"

"Why, I'd like to, dear, but I'm afraid I can't to-night," said her husband kindly. "I've got to go out and grub for worms — Wendell's coming up to help me, and Stone says he'll go with us and carry the lantern. Worms seem uncommonly hard to find out here. We never sent any word to Higgins to have some

for us. I'll ask Ellen for an old tomato can. You look tired; why don't you go to bed? I've got to get my things together afterward; I'll be puttering around till all hours."

"Oh, of course you will!" said his wife below her breath. What difference did it make whether the Von Rosens came or not, except that she was free of that unbearable sting of their entertainment? Their not coming hadn't altered the larger issue which they had set in motion. She and her husband had nothing in common any more, that was certain. She might as well be on the other side of the world. He didn't even know that she gave him short answers that fateful Thursday morning at breakfast. There was a whole day's hard work — he was a busy lawyer — before that seven-o'clock train at night with Wynkoop; a whole day's work before the glory of that dearly prized, transcendent holiday could begin, but the absorption of it was already in his eyes, in his voice, in every gesture.

Even as he kissed her good-bye in the hall, his hands were clapping his pockets to make sure certain treasures were in them, before putting on his hat and adequately snatching up the enormous pack, the landing-net, the rods, the camera, and that iron-weighted suit-case.

Then as he went striding down the walk, with

the free motion of one whose mind and muscles are lightly attune, while she held the door open gazing after him, the thing happened which she was always wishing might happen and which never did; he turned and took a couple of steps backward toward her to speak to her again. He called out:

"I'll bring you back all the trout you want!" in the tone of one pouring crown jewels at her feet. His dear, happy smile of unquenchable belief in her oneness with him was like a flashing accolade that touched her for an ennobling instant as she rose to the occasion.

"If you don't, I'll never forgive you!" she called back, with full-toned, glad high-heartedness.

She couldn't have done it if the Von Rosens had been coming!

When he was no longer in sight she went into the house again and sat down on the sofa, trembling a little, with a vista opening before her down which she could see but dimly as yet.

Perhaps — perhaps, in that sweet confusion of thoughts and feelings that seemed to have unbidden possession of her, she saw herself still, in some new way, the Dispenser of Delights; perhaps — she didn't know — it mightn't be a deadlock after all!

Bunny's Bag

Bunny's Bag

IT WAS the fifteenth of May. The large calendar with the enormous black numbers that hung opposite Mr. Ridgely Ferguson's desk announced the fact persistently whenever he raised his brown nervous eyes. Years after, when the fifteenth of May was mentioned, it brought back a vague, haunting sense that something of import, long since forgotten, had happened on that date; as the grief-stricken one in Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem, leaning forward with his hand on his knees, looking vacantly down into the weeds and grasses, remembered clearly afterward not what had driven him there, but only that "the wood-spurge" had a "cup of three."

Apart from looking at the calendar, Mr. Ferguson was staying home ostensibly to write a popular financial article — which incidentally refused to write itself — to be delivered to the magazine on Monday. It was Saturday — a half-holiday by rights — and his wife, who had an appointment with her sister in town directly after lunch, warmly

deplored the necessity of leaving the house when he was unaccustomedly in it.

"But you'll have a better chance to write when I'm out of the way!" she proclaimed. "Everything will be quiet this afternoon, and you'll have nothing to disturb you."

He had acquiesced, with a sneaking feeling of anticipatory relief in the possession of a perfectly clear field, the house all to himself, with none to ask him why or wherefore; with no sense of Bunny's pervading presence — neither the sound of her light footsteps nor her voice, as she went restlessly in and out of other rooms, nor her head poking in at the door to see how far he'd got, to disturb him even momentarily, nor — what went deeper! — that sense of the critical frame of her mind where he was concerned.

Yet, what is there in an empty house with all hindrances to work removed that so often militates against it? Why is it that when one stands no chance of interruption, ideas halt and stumble against some unseen barrier? There is a vacuum where before was fulness, a ghostly sense of strangeness in which the spirit has to strive to regain its natural bearings — a chill pressure is laid upon the working muscles that numbs it. Far off in the kitchen Ridgely could hear the clatter of dishes, or the dull shaking down of the kitchen range — alien sounds that

were usually veiled from his perception. The grandfather clock in the hall ticked loudly as in an empty vault; the strike was out of order, because he never could take the time to fix it. He had an almost irresistible desire to put down his urgent work and take time to fix it now. He might even have insanely done so if it hadn't occurred to him that he had forgotten to bring out the new weight for which Bunny had been asking him for the last two weeks.

Writing his financial article seemed on the face of it to be an easy task; his facts were ready to hand, cut from newspapers or noted down from other sources. The Express Companies, the Tariff, the Trusts, the High Cost of Living, were all represented — he had tabulated, figured, compared. The only difficulty lay in the proper handling of the subject; it had to catch the popular, untechnical reader; it all depended on getting the right keynote. He had already written and rejected seven opening paragraphs.

A yellow envelope on the mantelpiece to one side of the black-numbered calendar caught his roving eye: Nelly had brought it when the postman made his last round. He knew it as a bill from the plumber, which had no reason for being there, or for the "Please Remit," that, he felt by instinct, adorned one corner of it; he had had its double in his pocket since

last month, and had promised his wife faithfully to write out an immediate check for it from the balance which she knew to be in the bank. Somehow, when he got so far as putting a bill in his pocket he felt as if it were paid. He got up now, took the duplicate, tore it in small pieces with his long, nervous fingers, and dropped them in the waste-basket. There was no need of Bunny's seeing it when she came in.

On the brink of grappling with the financial article his mind wandered idly picking up foolish straws, such as "Seed-time and bill-time shall not fail"; he imagined the consternation in different households if all such missives were put in the hand of a special messenger with a whistle, to be called the Bill Whistler; what awful revelations would be made. He would send the check for this bill that very afternoon; he only hoped he wouldn't tell Bunny about his forgetfulness — he had an absurd habit of confession; he couldn't help telling her things even when he had firmly resolved not to.

He looked meditatively now at the faded, silver-framed photograph of her that had stood for eight years in the corner of his desk — a childish-faced Bunny, with a rose in her hair. She had a different expression now.

"There's some one at the telephone for you, sir."

Ridgely arose with a start and made his way

to the landing. It was his wife's voice at the other end of the wire.

"Ridgely, is that you, dearest?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, I want to tell you that we have just had the most delightful invitation for to-night. Sue and Joe are to take us with them to dinner at the Pallisers' — the Hawley Pallisers' — he's the artist, you know; they are the ones who have the gorgeous Italian studio, and are so charming. Do you understand me, dearest?"

"Yes, dear."

"I thought if you could take the six o'clock train — that ought to give you time to finish your article first. Besides, if you haven't finished it, you'll need a rest and a change then, anyway. The Pallisers are going to Europe next week, and we'll never get such an invitation again. I'm just crazy about it! And, dearest ——"

"Yes, dear."

"I want you to bring in a bag with my things. Nelly can get them together. You'd better get a pencil and paper and write them down. Have you got it there? Well, all right, dearest. Now *listen:*

"My evening gown."

"Your evening gown — which one?"

"Ridgely Ferguson, I've had the same evening gown for two years. The white silk, the only

one I possess. It's hanging up in my closet — Nelly knows. And my white silk stockings and white slippers. Tell Nelly to clean them with gasoline if they need it, and put them in the sun so they won't smell; and my long white gloves, the best pair; she'd better clean them, too; they are in my second drawer; or they may be rolled up in my silver scarf — I want that, too — in the blue window-box in my room. And I want my white bandeau for my hair; it has pink rosebuds on it — Nelly knows where it is. Have you written all that down, dear?"

"Yes, dear."

"Tell her to get the tan-leather suit-case from the tank room. Oh! — and I want my little pearl pendant, it's in the green case in my top drawer — the chain is in the jewel-box. Oh! — and my messaline underslip. Tell Nelly not to forget that when she gets the dress. I think that's all. Did I say the slippers, dearest?"

"Yes, dear."

"Perhaps you'd better read the list over, dearest."

"Yes, dear. White silk gown in closet. White silk stockings. White slippers to be cleaned. White gloves, ditto. Silver scarf in blue window-box. White bandeau with rosebuds for hair. Pearl pendant. Chain. White messaline slip."

"Yes, that *sounds* all right — and oh, dearest ——"

"Yes, dear."

"Be *sure* and don't forget a *thing*. Oh, and you'd better bring my tube of cold cream and the little silver shoe-horn on the dressing-table. Sue never keeps anything where you can find it, since the baby came. And dearest — there's a couple of yards of white baby ribbon in my work-basket or somewhere, if Nelly can find it — you *won't* forget anything this time, will you, dearest?"

"No, dear."

"Dinner's at seven-thirty. You'll have to get dressed yourself, don't forget that. Come straight up to Sue's as quick as you can with my things. Tell Nelly not to light the lamps, and to turn down the gas in the hall. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear."

Ridgely hung up the receiver and went back to his room. As he sat down to his work once more he had a paralyzing sensation of being physically and mentally exhausted. He took up the pen: his brains felt as if they had been scattered in a dozen different directions, and could never come together again to a focussing point.

"Please, sir —" it was Nelly's voice again as before. "Some one's at the telephone for you, sir."

Ridgely laid down his pen with an exclamation and stepped down to the landing once more. It was his wife's voice, as he knew it would be.

"Is that you, dearest?"

"Yes, dear."

"I just want to say that I hope you don't mind coming this way. If it were any ordinary invitation, I would have refused; but one like this, so important — you sounded some way as if — Sue is paying for these calls, dearest."

"No, I don't mind — it's all right. But I'll have to get back to work now, if ——"

"And you *won't* forget?"

"No. Good-bye!"

As he started back to his desk it suddenly struck him with a spasm of fear that he almost *had* forgotten. Nelly must be called at once and started on her quest. She listened, with her head on one side, as he read over the list aloud impressively; her running comments showed a reassuring intelligence that took the whole burden from him.

"Ah, yes, 'tis in her lower drawer. The blue window-seat — ah, yes. I'll find the gloves whichever place they are. Ah, yes, 'tis cleaned they have to be. If you'll give me the paper, sir — 'twill be all right. I'll have them in the big dress suitcase when you're ready for them."

It was already three o'clock. The indefinite spaciousness of the afternoon in which any large work might be accomplished had contracted to a meagre complement of two hours and a half — two hours and a quarter, for he must begin to dress and shave not later than five-fifteen.

He marshalled his slips and notes before him and strove with knitted brows to decide at just what point he should begin. The first sentence must catch the eye and pique the attention, while yet being the exact beginning from which the sequence would naturally flow. It gave an arresting shock to realize how nearly he had forgotten to speak to Nelly about Bunny's things! He might have exerted himself to throw a little more warmth into his tone when he said he didn't mind coming in — though it *was* taking time from his work.

It was just that lack of enthusiasm that Bunny had missed in his tone the first time and that she longed to call forth in him. That was the trouble — she weighed every tone, every gesture; she was always missing something in him and showing that she did.

A strong smell of gasoline assailed him — evidently Nelly, good girl, was following out instructions. The defective clock in the hall suddenly struck thirteen — an unnatural hour. By looking at his watch he found that thirty

minutes had gone from his afternoon. He went in the other room and deliberately laid out his togs, even his necktie, so that if he ever got started on his theme he needn't stop until the last possible minute.

He shaved, put on his dressing-gown, came back to his desk; it was five minutes of four. The sense of the shortness of the time left seemed to give a click to the close-locked mechanism of his brain; he seized the pen masterfully and wrote without hesitation his illuminating opening sentence:

"The late Commodore Vanderbilt was once heard to say ——"

The handling of the whole thing suddenly became plain before him; the newspaper clippings and financial tables and jottings fell into place like the blocks from a magic wand; his pen went like a race-horse. His face grew flushed as he wrote and wrote, faster and faster, with higher concentration each moment. A darkening shadow across his paper made him suddenly look up at last and glance at his watch. Immersed as he had been in his work, the sixth sense of a commuter as to trains had not left him.

Twenty minutes to six. He scratched another sentence, flung down the pen impatiently and dashed for his clothes, blessing himself for having laid them out.

"Nelly! Nelly!" he shouted, as he tugged on his waistcoat, "is that bag ready?"

"I'm just after closing it, sir," said the maid.

"You're sure everything is there?"

"Ah, yes, sir, everything."

"All right, give it to me, then."

He finished his hurried toilet subconsciously, his mind still immersed in pregnant sentences, caught up the bag, ran downstairs with it and deposited it by the front door while he put on his overcoat and hat, ran back upstairs swiftly to get his commutation and money — not very much of the latter — from the pocket of his everyday suit, and was off at last.

It was time. He swung complacently on to the just departing train with that pioneering prehensile leg-movement which bespeaks long practice.

There were not many people in the car at that time of day. Ridgely sat abstractedly, gazing straight before him, with brows knit, his lips occasionally moving with the reflex action of the paragraphs pounded out by his still-working brain. That was a good article, if he knew one; it could be read with interest by people who knew nothing technically of the subject as well as by those who did. It was by such handling of facts as this that men suited the popular taste, and to suit the popular taste meant money and perhaps fame. He might come to be an authority on certain subjects.

Ridgely turned suddenly and looked out of the window idly as the train made its only stop; it was an express from here on. He felt his half-arrested attention to have some hazy yet peculiar significance in it that seemed striving to reach his consciousness. Several people got on, but he certainly knew none of them — a gaunt, low-collared, long-throated, gum-chewing lad, a large woman with a little boy, and a pretty girl with a bag.

A bag! Ridgely leaned swiftly forward and groped beside him in the place where the tan-leather dress-suitcase should have been. It was not there — it never had been there, he had left it inside of the front door of his own house when he had dashed out of it!

He sat, still gropingly leaning forward, struck to stone, as the full horror of his loss broke over him.

The next instant he had grasped a time-card from his pocket and was wildly burrowing down into the figures, trying to extract a return train at the moment of his arrival in the big station, and another with which it might connect at home in time to get the bag after all.

As he knew before he looked, the outgoing train left five minutes before his rolled in, and the next would make eight-ten the earliest hour at which he could catch one back to town. It was as impossible now to get the bag to Bunny

in time for that dinner as to bring to life a man he might have murdered; there was an appalling, sheer finality about the frustrative quality of such a grotesquely small amount of time and space — so few miles to go, so few minutes lacking for accomplishment, and the bag utterly beyond reach.

It was the worst thing, short of death or disgrace, that could have happened; one thought stared him in the face: *What would Bunny look like when she saw that he hadn't brought the bag?*

The thought was such a baleful one that he leaned back with his eyes closed, to see it more clearly with his inner mind. If he could have had a moment's hope that even after the first shock she might condone his oversight! But there could be no such prospect. There had been times — times, as he allowed, much too many! — when he had too delusively entertained such a hope. Bunny never condoned anything he did; her clear sight of the reasons for any remissness on his part, and her irritated impatience at his omissions, grew with their recurrence.

He had no excuse to offer for having forgotten the bag, whose safe transmission meant so much to her, beyond the usual one of having been thinking of something else.

"Oh, you are *always* thinking of something

else," she would reply in that tone that he knew so well. "I *cannot* understand how you ——"

That was the way it always began. She would flare out, control herself with an effort, listen to his halting excuses, bitterly smiling, drive home a truth or two stingingly, thresh the whole matter out — heavens, at what length! — and finally, as one beaten to cover by circumstances too much for her, come to him, the angry, helpless tears still in her eyes, to be consoled by his caresses as the only thing left for her.

He knew, with a twinge, what this going to the Pallisers' meant to Bunny. She was always deeply susceptible to the joy of the Surprise. This stepping unexpectedly out of the rut of daily life into another world, virtually, at the Pallisers' Italian studio, would have given her the keenest pleasure. Well ——! This time she couldn't have the pleasure, that was all there was to it! And he had to meet her and tell her so; there was no help for that.

It wasn't only his larger faults that she minded, faults for which, when you came down to it, she had some reason to hold him to account. He had been conscious for this last year, especially, that her critical faculty where he was concerned had taken more and more possession of her. She was a woman who tried to live up to her own generous standard; she exacted

much from herself in the household, his home was well kept, his comfort considered and planned for unvaryingly.

But she noticed everything he did; if he pulled down a window-shade, she rose the moment after and pulled it a fraction higher or lower; if he laid a book inconsequently on the table, she immediately took it up and put it in the right place; if he poured a glass of water for himself, she instantly wiped up the few drops that he had spilled on the table. His necktie was never the right one to wear with that suit, and the suit itself the one that should have been sent to be pressed.

He either shut the door so hard that it made her jump or he didn't shut it at all. He forgot continually when he should have remembered, and remembered when he should have known that the conditions were changed. Bunny was not ill-tempered in this attitude of hers; she might even laugh as she chided, though with an inner note of earnestness that took all mirth out of the laughter — but his most trivial action was subjected to an adverse scrutiny that saw the flaw before it saw anything else — or saw nothing else.

Love cannot live in the chill atmosphere of continual criticism. Where the atmosphere is primarily of love, warm-enfolding, all-encouraging love, criticism may take its rightful, helpful

place among a hundred other forces, but it is a blighting, killing thing where it has the main prominence.

Ridgely had what he felt sometimes to be a foolish, boyish habit of confessing small misdeeds to his wife when she needn't have known them otherwise: when he forgot to post her letters, or made a mistake in an order to be delivered, or got something wrong that for a wonder she had taken for granted he had got right. He would resolve on the way home not to tell Bunny a word about it this time; yet after all he would find himself owning up lightly in a moment of weakness, and getting the storm over with at once; it seemed somehow petty, and not worthy of him, to keep such things from his wife even though he pandered to her critical spirit in so doing.

But perhaps the real reason lay back of this; perhaps the real reason — so dimly felt as to be unacknowledged — lay in the fact that if he recognized the necessity of silence toward her it would also be a recognition of that quality in her which he was growing to dislike; to dislike a quality in a person means usually, after a while, to dislike the person.

A sensation of intense bitterness surged suddenly over Ridgely, an overpowering revolt at the conditions of his life. Women take tally of their feelings continually, changing the

grades and colouring in the handling. It is well that so many of the reluctant perceptions of the normal man, unwarped by vice or genius, are unacknowledged to himself; for once to acknowledge a condition or a feeling makes it instantly concrete.

As Ridgely sat leaning forward, his head in his hands, his eyes gleaming with an exhausting flame, a long procession of days stretched out before him in which, instead of the warming and steady glow of the hearthfire, he should have the crackling of thorns; instead of bread, a stone. Heaven knew, he worked hard enough for Bunny to get her what she wanted!

There was this valise business. He had known all the time that he should never have been asked to stop his work and bring it in. He tried to keep a hold on himself through the intense passion that seemed about to rise and wreck him. He was sorry that she should be disappointed; of course he realized that this chance to visit the Pallisers was an unusual one that probably wouldn't occur again; they were unusual people much sought after.

Yes — but suppose Bunny *was* disappointed, what did it all amount to anyway that such monstrous prominence should be given it as he foresaw would be the case? Her face, when her eyes first fell on him without that bag, showed itself inexorably before him. He felt

in advance the impatient, dumb writhings of spirit to which that exhausting disappointment, with all its raking up of past misdeeds, would condemn him until he was finally and tearfully forgiven, when he no longer cared whether he were forgiven or not, except that the air would fortunately be breathable once more.

This, then, was what his married life had come to be: a shift, an evasion, an eternal struggle to keep up with trivial demands that meant nothing, that never should have been made! The daily irritation, the continued picking at him, the continued lack of sympathy, why should he put up with them longer?

An utterly wild and insane idea took momentary possession of him. Suppose he cut the scene with Bunny altogether; suppose he stepped out of this train into one that would carry him far, far out West? Yellowstone Park spread out before him, all crimson and purple rocks and golden-hazed mountains.

Suppose he took another train and stepped into a new life where a man could be a man, where there were big things instead of these little ones that made this slowly tightening, fettering web about his feet? He had always loved travel; in his boyhood he had imagined himself going through many lands. He mechanically thrust his hand into his pocket; the action brought him back sanely to reality. Besides

his commutation ticket, he had but a dollar and fifty cents. What *had* come over him, anyway?

He rose, as he saw others doing; the train was nearing the terminus. There was still that tube journey for him afterward! He remembered suddenly, as if it were in the trembling film of a moving-picture, an intoxicated man sitting with a friend on the opposite side of a midnight trolley once in the past; the friend was loudly proffering encouragement as to the fitness of the tipsy one's condition, in view of his home-coming. The latter, while confidently agreeing, stopped every few minutes to lament fearfully: "Yes, but what'll my *wife* say when she sees me?"

The gray stone of the platform, the darkened lines of cars on the tracks, the high iron railing separating them from the gray stone space outside the waiting-rooms with their swinging doors, the broad flight of gray stone steps leading upward at the side, showed desolately through the electric lights as the small straggling procession emerged from the train — passengers belonging to no regular hour of travel and with no cheerful suggestion of the business world about them.

Hunched ahead of Ridgely in the dreary emptiness of the station were two smaller, slouch-hatted men carrying bundles. A short,

shawled, pyramidal Italian woman followed with several children. He hurried past them straggling and went down the steps to the tunnel automatically, a desultory figure going his way as in a dream. He was steeped in a monstrous moodiness in which this sickening, chafing episode seemed as if it would never come to an end and be over instead of always in prospect.

He sat down in the tunnel car with a lurch and something hit lightly against his hand; as he looked down he saw that a tiny locket which he wore on his watch had come open. Within was the tiniest curl, the faintest flaxen wisp, cut from the head of the baby boy whose brief little life had ended seven years before.

Something blurred Ridgely's vision. With a mighty rush came a torrent of tenderness for Bunny — his Bunny — little bride, little wife, little mother. Ah, little mother! Could he ever forget her face when the baby first lay in her arms after that terrible fight for life — could he ever forget her face when the boy went from them, lying in his arms at the very last, so little and so unspeakably dear? The greatness of that bond of joy and grief — oh, what, what could ever lessen it? How infinitely small seemed these selfishnesses and meannesses of hers — yes, and his! when one so much as touched the healing garment of Love. Poor

little Bunny, whoever else meted out stern justice to her, not he — never he!

He sat up straight now, still looking piercingly ahead of him athwart the white-enamelled posts of the car into the rock-bound darkness outside. There was a new sadness in his eyes, a firmer compression of his lips.

That rush of love and pity still held its place, but he knew also inexorably that it would fade, as before; no such moment of sentiment could keep its living force in the demands of the present. One couldn't live only on the love of the past with a living, changing person; one drew one's breath every morning anew to the day and the love and the problems of it. He ought to try to help Bunny of course; he ought to try to remember what she missed. As for what he missed — why, he could be strong enough to stand it.

The car came to a stop, and he rose with a sigh.

"*Yes, but what'll my wife say when she sees me?*"

There was still the trolley ride to Sue's apartment before this interminable intermezzo came to an end.

But after he had reached the top of the long steps that lead up from the tube he saw in astonishment a little figure in a blue suit and a blue velvet hat with rosebuds on it, just beyond the barrier of the ticket-takers — no other than Bunny herself!

He braced himself for the fearful moment when her gaze would take in the damning fact that the precious bag was not with him — yes, she saw! but with no change of expression unless it were to one of relief.

"Oh, I'm so, so glad you got my last telephone," she said excitedly, as she put out her hand to press his arm when he came near her, with that slight alteration of colour that always showed in her face when she met her husband suddenly. She went on talking swiftly:

"I was so afraid there might be some mistake! Nelly said she knew you must only have stepped out for a minute, for the bag was still by the hall door while she was talking. It was awfully sweet of you to come in this way. I wasn't sure you would care to. Nelly gave you the message correctly, I suppose. The baby had just broken out with the measles, and of course Sue and Joe couldn't go to the Pallisers' — that threw us out completely, and I was *so* disappointed, when I had been expecting such a good time! That was why I asked you to come in anyway and we'd have a little dinner together somewhere — they're so upset at Sue's, and we had only chops and string beans at home anyway! As I telephoned, if you hadn't got here by seven o'clock, I should have taken the next train home. But it was awfully nice of you to come!"

"I have only a dollar and fifty cents with me," said Ridgely warningly.

"Oh, I have a five-dollar bill. I wouldn't have suggested the dinner if I hadn't had the money. I know you too well for that! You never ——" she stopped short with an odd effort, as if in some way recalling herself from a forbidden path. Her eyes searched his face.

"Do you know, you looked so strange as you came toward me — I noticed it the first moment I caught sight of you — as if you had been *terribly* ill," her voice shook for an instant, "and gone to heaven! I know you work too hard! It gave me the most awful shock, until I saw that your necktie was crooked — oh, don't laugh at me! — and that your shoes needed a shine."

"You deserve to be laughed at," said Ridgely. "I never felt better in my life. I'm going to wear my necktie crooked after this, and go without shines entirely, if I feel like it — you *hear?*"

His tone had a fascinating, careless, masculine peremptoriness as her eyes helplessly adored him, for the moment giving all, asking nothing; she had all the charm of the little Bunny he had married.

"Come on, Bun, don't let's stand here spooning; let's go and get something to eat."

As usual, when one had braced one's self for

a mighty effort, the sands of occasion had shifted into a new shape that made the effort unnecessary. In the utterly unexpected bubbling joyousness of this reprieve, in which his spirits rose like a cork, Ridgely yet felt himself in danger of yielding to a grandly careless, overpowering impulse to confession that might spoil everything now.

If he could *only* keep from telling Bunny that he had forgotten that bag!

The Blossoming Rod

The Blossoming Rod

MR. LANGSHAW had vaguely felt unusual preparations for a Christmas gift to him this year; he was always being asked for "change" to pay the children for services rendered.

It might have seemed a pity that calculation as to dollars and cents entered so much into the Christmas festivities of the family, if it were not that it entered so largely into the scheme of living that it was naturally interwoven with every dearest hope and fancy; the overcoming of its limitations gave a zest to life. Langshaw himself, stopping now, as was his daily habit, to look at the display made by the sporting-goods shop on his way home the Friday afternoon before Christmas Monday, wondered, as his hand touched the ten-dollar bill in his pocket — a debt unexpectedly paid him that day — if the time had actually arrived at last when he might become the possessor of the trout-rod that stood in the corner of the window; reduced, as the ticket proclaimed, from fifteen dollars to ten.

The inspiration was the more welcome because the moment before his mind had been idly yet disquietingly filled with the shortcomings of George, his eldest child and only son, aged ten, who didn't seem to show that sense of responsibility which his position and advanced years called for — even evading his duties to his fond mother when he should be constituting himself her protector. He was worried as to the way George would turn out when he grew up.

This particular trout-rod, however, had an attraction for Langshaw of long standing. He had examined it carefully more than once when in the shop with his neighbour, Wickersham; it wasn't a fifty-dollar rod, of course, but it seemed in some ways as good as if it were — it was expensive enough for him! He had spoken of it once to his wife, with a craving for her usual sympathy, only to meet with a surprise that seemed carelessly disapproving.

"Why, you have that old one of your father's and the bass-rod already; I can't see why you should want another. You always say you can't get off to go fishing as it is."

He couldn't explain that to have this particular split bamboo would be almost as good as going on a fishing trip; with it in his hand he could feel himself between green meadows, the line swirling down the rushing brook. But

later Clytie had gone back to the subject with pondering consideration:

"Ten dollars seems an awful price for a rod! I'm sure I could buy the same thing for much less uptown; wouldn't you like me to see about it some day?"

"Great Scott! Never think of such a thing!" he had replied in horror. "I could get much cheaper ones myself! If I ever have the money I'll do the buying — you hear?"

"—— Hello, Langshaw! Looking at that rod again? Why don't you blow yourself to a Christmas present? Haven't you got the nerve?"

"That's what I don't know!" called Langshaw with a wave of the hand as Wickersham passed by. Yet, even as he spoke he felt he did know — his mind was joyously, adventurously made up to have "the nerve"; he had a right, for once in the twelve years of his married life, to buy himself a Christmas present that he really wanted, in distinction to the gift that family affection prompted, and held dear as such, but which had no relation to his needs or desires. Children and friends were provided for; his wife's winter suit — a present by her transforming imagination — already in the house; the Christmas turkey for the janitor of the children's school subscribed to — sometimes he had wished himself the janitor! and all the small demands that drain the purse at the festal season carefully

counted up and allowed for. There was no lien on this unexpected sum just received. The reel and the line, and the flies and such, would have to wait until another time, to be sure; but no one could realize what it would be to him to come home and find that blessed rod there. He had a wild impulse to go in and buy it that moment, but such haste seemed too slighting to the dignity of that occasion, which should allow the sweets of anticipation — though no one knew better than he the danger of delay where money was concerned: it melted like snow in the pocket. Extra funds always seemed to bring an extra demand.

The last time there was ten dollars to spare there had been a letter from Langshaw's mother, saying that his sister Ella, whose husband was unfortunately out of a position, had developed flat-foot; and a pair of suitable shoes, costing nine-fifty, had been prescribed by the physician. Was it possible for her dear boy to send the money? Ella was so depressed.

The ten dollars had, of course, gone to Ella. Both Langshaw and his wife had an unsympathetic feeling that if they developed flat-foot now they would have to go without appropriate shoes.

"You look quite gay!" said his wife as she greeted him on his return, her pretty oval face, with its large dark eyes and dark curly locks,

held up to be kissed. "Has anything nice happened?"

"You look gay too!" he evaded laughingly, as his arms lingered round her. Clytie was always a satisfactory person for a wife. "What's this pink stuff on your hair — popcorn?"

"Oh, goodness! Baby has been so bad, she has been throwing it round everywhere," she answered, running ahead of him upstairs to a room that presented a scene of brilliant disorder.

On the bed was a large box of tinselled Christmas-tree decorations and another of pink and white popcorn — the flotsam and jetsam of which strewed the counterpane and the floor to its farthest corners, mingled with scraps of glittering paper, an acreage of which surrounded a table in the centre of the room that was adorned with mucilage pot and scissors. A large feathered hat, a blue silk dress, and a flowered skirt were on the rug, near which a very plump child of three, with straggling yellow hair, was trying to get a piece of gilt paper off her shoe. She looked up with roguish blue eyes to say rapidly:

"Fardie doesn't know what baby goin' a give'm for Kissemus!"

"Hello! This looks like the real thing," said Langshaw, stepping over the débris; "but what are all these clothes on the floor for?"

"Oh, Mary was dressing up and just dropped

those things when she went to the village with Viney, though I called her twice to come back and pick them up," said the mother, sweeping the garments out of the way. "It's so tiresome of her! Oh, I know you stand up for everything Mary does, Joe Langshaw; but she is the hardest child to manage!"

Her tone insensibly conveyed a pride in the difficulty of dealing with her elder daughter, aged six.

"But did you ever see anything like Baby? She can keep a secret as well as any one! It does look Christmassy, though — doesn't it? Of course all the work of the tree at the mission comes on me as usual. The children, with the two Wickersham girls, were helping me until they got tired. Why don't you come and kiss father, Baby? She is going to sweep up the floor with her little broom so that father will give her five cents."

"I don't want to fweep 'e floor!" said the child, snapping her blue eyes.

"She shall get her little broom and fardie will help her," said Langshaw, catching the child up in his arms and holding the round little form closely to him before putting her down carefully on her stubby feet.

Later, when the game of clearing up was over and the nickel clutched in Baby's fat palm, he turned to his wife with a half-frown:

"Don't you think you are making the children rather mercenary, Clytie? They seem to want to be paid for everything they do. I'm just about drained out of change!"

"Oh, at Christmas!" said the wife expressively.

"Well, I hope nobody is going to spend any money on me; the only presents I want are those you make for me," said Langshaw warningly. He gave the same warning each year, undeterred by the nature of the articles produced. His last year's "Christmas" from Clytie had been a pair of diaphanous blue China-silk pajamas that were abnormally large in chest and sleeves — as for one of giant proportions — and correspondingly contracted in the legs, owing to her cutting out the tops first and having to get the other necessary adjuncts out of the scant remainder of the material. "You hear me, Clytie?"

"Yes, I hear," returned Clytie in a bored tone.

"Do you know ——" Langshaw hesitated, a boyish smile overspreading his countenance. "I was looking at that trout-rod in Burchell's window to-day. I don't suppose you remember my speaking of it, but I've had my eye on it for a long time." He paused, expectant of encouraging interest.

"Oh, have you, dear?" said Clytie absently. The room was gradually, under her fingers,

resuming its normal appearance. She turned suddenly with a vividly animated expression.

"I must tell you that you're going to get a great surprise to-night — it isn't a Christmas present, but it's something that you'll like even better, I know. It's about something that George has been doing. You'll never guess what it is!"

"Is that so?" said Langshaw absently in his turn. He had a momentary sense of being set back in his impulse to confidences that was not, after all, untinged with pleasure. His delightful secret was still his own, unmarred by unresponsive criticism. "By the way, Clytie, I don't like the way George has been behaving lately. He hasn't shown me his report from school in months; whenever I ask him for it he has some excuse. Hello! Is that little Mary crying?"

"I wonder what on earth has happened now!" exclaimed the mother, rushing from the room to return the next instant, pulling after her a red-cloaked and red-hatted little girl who sought to hide behind her.

"Well, what do you think she's done?" Clytie's tone was withering as she haled forth the shrinking culprit, her small hands over her eyes. "She lost her purse with the dollar she had saved up for your Christmas present — lost the money for dear father's present; and

all because she took it with her to buy a five-cent pencil — a green pencil with purple glass in the end of it; to buy something for *herself* before Christmas!" Clytie paused tragically. "Of course, if she hadn't taken her money out to spend it on herself she wouldn't have lost it!"

"I don't care!" burst out the culprit, her big, dark eyes, just like her mother's, flashing from under her brown curls, and her red lips set defiantly. "It was my own money, anyhow, if I did lose it. I earned it all myself. It wasn't yours!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" interposed the father in gentle reproof. "Little girls mustn't talk like that to dear mother. Come, get up here on father's knee — so." He took off the red cap, tucked the brown curly head in the bend of his arm, his chin resting on the top of it as he went on, with the child's small hands clutching at his. "Mary must always do what mother says; but, so far as this money is concerned, you can make me something that I would like far better than anything you could buy. Why don't you make me another pincushion, for instance? The one you gave me last year is quite worn out."

"A pink one?" asked Mary faintly.

"Yes. What's the matter now?" The child had suddenly wriggled to a kneeling posture in his hold and had her little strangling arms round his neck in a tempest of sobs.

"I don't want to give you a pi-ink pincushion — I don't want to! I want my dollar! I want my dollar — to spend! I want —— Father, I want my dollar — my do-o-ol-lar! I want my ——"

"What did I tell you, Mary Langshaw?" cried Clytie. She appealed to her husband. "It's just the way I knew she'd act. Now I suppose you'll have to give it to her. Mary, be still a moment — her head is so hot!"

"There, there!" said Langshaw soothingly. "She shall have her money this minute."

"Of course she doesn't deserve it," said Clytie, but with a tone of relief in her voice that seemed oddly greater than the occasion warranted. Mary had wound herself round him passionately; her sobs were dying away happily in long, deep breaths at intervals. Baby, being undressed on her mother's lap, was laughing over some pieces of gilt paper. In the heart of this domesticity it was as if the father and mother were embarked with this little company on a full and swelling river of love, of which they felt the exquisite soothing ripples.

Langshaw put his hand into his pocket.

"No, I can't give you the dollar this minute, little girl; father has only a ten-dollar bill. I'll get it changed right after dinner. Isn't dinner 'most ready, Clytie?"

"We'll go down just as soon as I get Baby in

bed," said the mother peacefully. "I don't see why George isn't here. Goodness! There he is now," she added as a tremendous slam of the front door announced the fact. The next moment a small boy, roguishly blue-eyed and yellow-haired like Baby, with an extremely dirty face and a gray sweater half covered with mud, hurled himself into the room, surreptitiously tickling one of Baby's bare feet and pulling Mary's curls on his way to greet his father.

"What have you been doing to get so dirty?"

"Playing cops and robbers," said the boy, serenely. His dimples appeared suddenly; his eyes lit up. "Say, mother" — he turned to her irresolutely — "shall I tell father now?"

"Not until after dinner," returned the mother inexorably. "Go and make yourself clean!"

"May I put on my white silk tie?" George's white tie was the banner of festivity.

"Yes."

"You rouse my curiosity. This seems to be a great occasion," said Langshaw.

"Oh, it is!" agreed the mother happily. She murmured in his ear as they went downstairs: "I hope you'll show that you're pleased, dear. You know sometimes when you really are pleased you don't show it at once — and George has been trying so hard. If you'll only show that you're pleased ——"

"Yes — all right!" returned the husband a

little impatiently. Clytie had a sensitive consideration for her son's feelings which struck him at times as exaggerated. He thought of the delightful secret back in his own mind; there was no reason for talking any more about the rod until he brought it; he would manage to replace the dollar abstracted from the reserve fund.

If he gave absent answers during the meal Clytie seemed to be preoccupied also. Little Mary, who sat by him, tucked her hand into his as she prattled.

"Now, George!" said his mother at last suddenly when the rice pudding had been finished. George rose, clean and red-cheeked, looking more than ever like a large edition of Baby, in spite of his jacket and knickerbockers, as he stepped over to his father with a new dignity and handed him a folded sheet of paper.

"What's this?" asked Langshaw genially opening it. He read aloud the words within, written laboriously in a round, boyish hand:

To George Brander Langshaw, from father.
You Oh me five dolers.
Reseived paiment.

"Hello! Hello! What does this mean?" asked Langshaw slowly with an unpleasant startled sensation that any such sum in connection with George was out of all reason.

"It means a bill for you from me!" announced George. His cheeks grew redder, his blue eyes looked squarely at his father. "It's for this!" He pulled from his pocket a school report card divided into tiny ruled squares, filled with figures for half its length, and flung it down proudly on the table before his parent.

"It's the Deportment — since September. You said when Miss Skinner sent that last note home about me that if I could get a hundred in Deportment for every month up to Christmas you'd be willing to pay me five dollars. You can see there for yourself, father, the three one hundreds — no, not that line — that's only fifty-five for spelling; nobody ever knows their spelling! Here is the place to look — in the Deportment column. I've tried awful hard to be good, father, to surprise you."

"The way that child has tried!" burst forth Clytie, her dark eyes drowned in sparkles. "And they're so unfair at school — giving you a mark if you squeak your chair, or speak, or look at anybody; as if any child could be expected to sit like a stone all the time! I'm sure I love to hear children laughing — and you know yourself how hard it is for George to be quiet! We had a little talk about it together, he and I; and now you see! It's been such work keeping his card from you each month when you asked for it. One day he thought he had a bad mark

and he couldn't eat any dinner — you thought he was ill; but he went to Miss Skinner the next day and she took it off because he had been trying so hard to be good. Joe, why don't you speak?"

"George, I'm proud of you!" said Langshaw simply. There was a slight huskiness in his voice; the round face and guileless blue eyes of his little boy, who had tried "awful hard to be good," seemed to have acquired a new dignity. The father saw in him the grown-up son who could be depended upon to look after his mother if need were. Langshaw held out his hand as man to man; the two pairs of eyes met squarely. "Nothing you could have done would have pleased me more than this, George. I value it more than any Christmas present I could have."

"Mother said you'd like it," said the beaming George, ducking his head suddenly and kicking out his legs from behind.

"And you'll pay the five dollars?" supplemented Clytie anxiously.

"Surely!" said Langshaw. The glances of the parents met in one of the highest pleasures that life affords: the approval together of the good action of their dear child. "George can go out and get this ten-dollar bill changed."

"If you can't spare it, father ——" suggested the boy with some new sense of manliness, hanging back.

"I'm glad to be able to spare it," said the father soberly. "It's a good deal of money," he added. "I suppose, of course, you'll put it in the bank, George?"

"Now you mustn't ask what he's going to do with it," said Clytie.

"Oh, isn't it much!" cried little Mary.

"Dear me, there's the doorbell," said Clytie. "Who can it be at this hour? Run, George, and see!"

"It's a letter for you, mother," announced George, reappearing. "There's a man in the hall, waiting for an answer."

"It looks like a bill," said Clytie nervously, tearing open the envelope; "but I don't owe any bill. Why, it's two and a quarter, from the tailor, for fixing over my old suit last fall! I'm positive I paid it weeks ago. There's some mistake."

"He says he's been here three times, but you were out."

"Have you any money for it, Clytie?" asked her husband.

Clytie looked as if a thunderbolt had struck her.

"Yes, I have; but — oh, I don't want to take it for that! I need every penny I've got."

"Well, there's no need of feeling so badly about it," said Langshaw resignedly.

"Give the ten-dollar bill to the man, George,

and see if he can change it." He couldn't resist a slight masculine touch of severity at her incapacity. "I wish you'd tend to these things at the time, Clytie, or let me know about them." He took the money when George returned. "Here's your dollar now, Mary — don't lose it again! — and your five, George. You might as well take another dollar yourself, Clytie, for extras."

He pocketed the remainder of the change carelessly. After his first pang at the encroachment on the reserve fund the rod had sunk so far out of sight that it was almost as if it had never been. He had, of course, known all along that he would not buy it. Even the sting of the "Amount due" quickly evaporated.

Little Mary gave a jump that bumped her brown curly head against him.

"You don't know what I'm going to give you for Christmas!" she cried joyously.

II

Langshaw was one of those men who have an inherited capacity for enjoying Christmas. He lent it his attention with zest, choosing the turkey himself with critical care as he went through the big market in town, from whence he brought also wreaths and branches of holly that seemed to have larger and redder berries

than could be bought in the village. On Christmas Eve he put up the greens that decorated the parlour and dining-room — a ceremony that required large preparations with a step-ladder, a hammer, tacks, and string, the removal of his coat, and a lighted pipe in one corner of his mouth; and which proceeded with such painstaking slowness on account of his coming down from the ladder every other moment to view the artistic effect of the arrangements, that it was only by sticking the last branches up any old way at Clytie's wild appeal that he ever got it finished at all.

Then he helped her fill the stockings, his own fingers carefully giving the crowning effect of orange and cornucopia in each one, and arranging the large packages below, after tiptoeing down the stairs with them so as not to wake the officially sleeping children, who were patently stark awake, thrashing or coughing in their little beds. The sturdy George had never been known to sleep on Christmas Eve, always coming down the next day esthetically pale and with abnormally large eyes, to the feast of rapture.

On this Saturday — Christmas Eve's eve — when Langshaw finally reached home, laden with all the "last things" and the impossible packages of tortuous shapes left by fond relatives at his office for the children — one pocket of his overcoat weighted with the love-

box of really good candy for Clytie — it was evident as soon as he opened the hall door that something unusual was going on upstairs. Wild shrieks of "It's father! It's father!" rent the air.

"It's father!"

"Fardie! Fardie, don't come up!"

"Father, don't come up!"

"Father, it's your present!"

There was hasty scurrying of feet, racing to and fro, and further shrieks. Langshaw waited, smiling. It was evidently a "boughten" gift then; the last had been a water pitcher, much needed in the household. He braced himself fondly for immense enthusiasm over this.

An expression of intense excitement was visible on each face when finally he was allowed to enter the upper room. Mary and Baby rushed at him to clasp his leg, while his wife leaned over to kiss him as he whispered:

"I brought out a lot of truck; it's all in the closet in the hall."

George, standing with his hands in his pockets, proclaimed loudly, with sparkling eyes:

"You nearly saw your present! It's from mother and us. Come here, Baby, and pull brother's leg. Say, father, do you like cut glass?"

"O-oh!" came in ecstatic chorus from the other two, as at a delightful joke.

"It's a secret!" announced Baby, her yellow hair falling over one round, blue eye.

"I believe it's a pony," said the father. "I'm sure I heard a pony up here!"

Shouts of renewed joy greeted the jest.

All the next day, Christmas Eve itself, whenever two or three of the family were gathered together there were secret whisperings, more scurryings, and frenzied warnings for the father not to come into the room. In spite of himself, Langshaw began to get a little curious as to the tobacco jar or the fire shovel, or whatever should be his portion. He not only felt resigned to not having the trout-rod, but a sort of wonder also rose in him that he had been bewitched — even momentarily — into thinking he could have it. What did it matter anyway?

"It's worth it, old girl, isn't it?" he said cryptically as he and Clytie met once unexpectedly in the hall, and he put his arm round her.

"Yes!" answered his wife, her dark eyes lustrous. Sometimes she didn't look much older than little Mary. "One thing though I must say: I do hope, dear, that — the children have been thinking so much of our present to you and saving up so for it — I do hope, Joe, that if you are pleased you'll show it. So far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter; but sometimes — when, of course, I know how pleased

you really are — you don't show it at once to others. That's why I hope you'll show it to-morrow if ——"

"Great Scott! Clytie, let up on it! What do you want me to do — jump up and down and make a fool of myself?" asked her husband scornfully. "You leave me alone!"

It was Langshaw's firm rule, vainly protested even by his wife, that the household should have breakfast on Christmas Day before tackling the stockings — a hurried mockery of a meal, to be sure, yet to his masculine idea a reënforcement of food for the infant stomach before the long, hurtling joy of the day. The stockings and the piles under them were taken in order, according to age — the youngest first and the others waiting in rapt interest and admiration until their turn arrived — a pretty ceremony.

In the delicious revelry of Baby's joy, as her trembling, fat little fingers pulled forth dolls and their like, all else was forgotten until it was Mary's turn, and then George's and then the mother's. And then, when he had forgotten all about it: "Now father!" There was seemingly a breathless moment while all eyes turned to him.

"It's father's turn now; father's going to have his presents. Father, sit down here on the sofa — it's your turn now."

There were only a blue cornucopia and an orange and a bottle of olives in his stocking, a Christmas card from his sister Ella, a necktie from grandmamma, and nothing, as his quick eye had noted, under it on the floor; but now George importantly stooped down, drew a narrow package from under the sofa and laid it beside his father, pulling off the paper. Inside was a slim, longish, gray linen bag. Langshaw studied it for a moment before opening it.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he breathed, with a strange glance round at the waiting group and an odd, crooked smile. "I'll be jiggered!"

There in its neatly grooved sections lay the rod, ready to be put together — not *a* rod, but, as his eye almost unbelievingly reassured him, *the* rod — the ticket of the shop adorning it — in all its beauty of golden shellac and delicate tip. His fingers touched the pieces reverently.

"Well, will you look at that! How did you ever think of getting it?"

"How did I think of it? Because you talked about it all the time," said his wife scornfully, with her arms round his neck from behind, while the children flung themselves upon him. "Oh, I know you thought you didn't; but you did just the same. George heard you too. We got Mr. Wickersham to pick it out. He said it was the one you wanted. And the reel — you haven't noticed that box there — the reel is

the right kind, he says; and the line is silk — the best. There's the book of flies too — six. Baby's crazy over them! Mr. Wickersham said it was all just what you ought to have. We've been saving up for the longest time; but we had to wait, you see, for George's deportment before the things could be bought. If it isn't right ——"

"Right? Say, this is the finest present I ever had!" said Langshaw with glittering eyes and that little crooked smile. "It just beats everything!"

He rose, scattering his adoring family, and, walking to the window, threw it open to the frosty December air and called across to a neighbour standing on the walk.

"Want to come over here, Hendon? Got something to show you. Will you look at this! Present from my wife and the kids — been saving up for it. It's a peach, I'll tell you that! I'm going to take George off fishing this spring —— What? Well, come over later, when you've got time to take a good look at it."

"Do you like it, father?" came from three different voices at once.

"Do I like it? You can just bet I do," said Langshaw emphatically. He bent and kissed the three upturned faces, and leaned toward his wife afterward to press her sweet waiting lips with his; but his eyes, as if drawn

by a magnet, were only on the rod — not the mere bundle of sticks he might have bought, but transformed into one blossoming with love.

"And do you know, we hardly saw a thing of him all day!" Clytie proudly recounted afterward to her sister. "My dear, he would hardly take time to eat his dinner or speak to any one; he was out in the back yard with Henry Wickersham and Mr. Hendon until dark, flapping that rod in circles — the silliest thing! He nearly sent a hook into George's eye once. George acted as bewitched as he did. Joe kept telling every single person who came along that it was 'a present from his wife and the kids.' He certainly showed that he was pleased."

"It's been a pretty nice day, hasn't it?" Langshaw said to his wife that Christmas night when the children were at last in bed. "Best Christmas I ever had! To think of you and the kids doing all this for me."

His hand rested lovingly on the rod, now once again swathed in the gray linen bag. He would have been the last to realize that, in his humble way, he typified a diviner Fatherhood to the little family who trusted in his care for them — for all things came of him and of his own had they given him.

THE END

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